

**MAIN**  
**MAIN**

917.3 B92 1288434  
Buck  
American argument

917.3 B92 1288434  
Buck \$3.00  
American argument

**MAIN**

kansas city



public library

kansas city, missouri

Books will be issued only  
on presentation of library card.

Please report lost cards and  
change of residence promptly.

Card holders are responsible for  
all books, records, films, pictures  
or other library materials  
checked out on their cards.

KANSAS CITY, MO PUBLIC LIBRARY

0 0001 0153344 6

KANSAS CITY



DATE DUE

WEST FRANK	West		
4 APR 49	OCT 7 '49		
APR 12 '49	OCT 10 '49		
28 MAR '49	OCT 3 '49		
4 APR '49	NOV 25 1949		
JUN 2 '49	NOV 25 1949		
SWINNEY			
JUN 7 '49	DEC 29 1949		
B. J.			
JUL 8 '49			
JUL 14 '50			
F. H. '49			
6. 27 FEB '62	5-3/0		
AUG 18 '49			
Center Com.			
AUG 15 '49			
L. G.			
SEP 13 '49			
LOUIS GEORGE			
6 SEP '49	30		

# AMERICAN ARGUMENT

*By Pearl S. Buck*

*With Eslanda Goode Robeson*

Two American women, both mature, successful, and holding no grudges against life, discuss their own country from differing and sometimes opposing, but always basic, points of view.

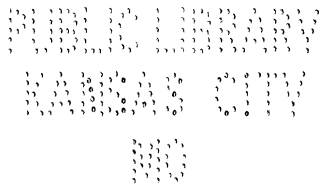
Here is the way the United States looks to them as women, as mothers, as Americans, as world citizens, and above all as human beings. Their range of topics is wide—marriage, the education of children, the organization of home and career, woman's place in the local and national community, women and politics, our government, the hopes of the world. Often they agree, sometimes they disagree sharply; throughout it is a firm but friendly argument.

Mrs. Robeson is well known, not only as the wife of Paul Robeson, but for her *African Journey* and other writings.

PUBLIC LIBRARY  
KANSAS CITY  
MO



VJABRELI 01007  
YTD 2428A3  
081



## AMERICAN ARGUMENT

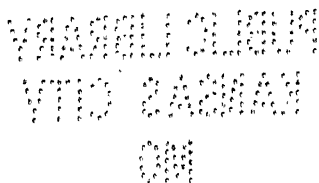
WABE 1310N  
770 2A28AM  
04

PUBLIC LIBRARY  
PEARL S. BUCK  
NO

AMERICAN  
ARGUMENT

*with Eslanda Goode Robeson*

THE JOHN DAY COMPANY, *New York*



## *Publishers' Note*

*The two American women who made this "talk book" together met on terms of complete equality. They agreed at the outset that neither would alter or censor what the other had said, and they have kept this agreement. After the book was completed, Mrs. Robeson sent us a foreword which we insert at her request.*

# Foreword

BY ESLANDA GOODE ROBESON

IT WAS MANY YEARS AGO THAT I FIRST MET Pearl Buck through her book *The Good Earth*, and became a fan of hers. That book brought a hitherto unconscious vague ambition of my life into focus, and since then much of my work has been consciously directed toward the fulfillment of that ambition.

In 1931 I thought quite a lot of myself; I was very well educated (in the American sense of the word) and thought I was experienced and successful. Of course I was young then—not young in years (I was thirty-five) but very young in human awareness and world experience.

After I had read *The Good Earth*, it dawned on me that I did not know anything at all about billions of people on this earth, and their ways of life. This revelation of my enormous ignorance rocked me back on my self-confident heels, and I set about correcting this serious lack of knowledge. I have been working at it ever since. And somewhere along the way I set myself a goal—not only would I learn as much as I could about all the peoples in the world, but I would also try, at some point, to introduce my white fellow countrymen, and the rest of the world, to my own Negro people.

All during my life I have often had occasion to be annoyed, infuriated, amazed, amused at the universal deliberate lack of knowledge, and the downright malicious misinformation about my people—deliberate and malicious on the part of the rulers, not the ordinary people. So I thought, with what I now know to have been stagger-

## FOREWORD

ing optimism, if some day I can write a book that will introduce readers to my people the way Pearl Buck introduced me to the Chinese people, then Eslanda, my girl, you will have done something!

When I casually mentioned this ambition to a very understanding friend, Carl Van Vechten, he promptly made another of his characteristically generous and practical gestures; he arranged a dinner party at his home at which Paul, Pauli, and I met Pearl Buck and her husband, Richard Walsh. Since then a lot of things have happened between us, all good things, to the high point of our writing this book together.

As I have come to know Pearl, I have become more than ever a fan of hers. Any fan will appreciate the satisfaction of learning—when the privilege of direct personal contact is achieved—that the admired one is even more worthy of admiration; satisfaction because it confirms one's own sense of good taste, good judgment, and personal discovery, and above all the feeling that not everything or everyone is disappointing in a frequently disappointing world. I find Pearl beautiful, feminine, strong, wise, dignified, direct, fearless, calm, sympathetic, solid, full of humor, and warm—both intellectually and personally.

As a Negro-American, I have always bitterly resented the segregation and discrimination my country metes out to my people; but I have always resented this in a family sort of way. I have always known that I am as American as any other American, more American than some; not more so because I am American for three generations back, and because my grandfather as secretary of state and secretary of the treasury of South Carolina took part in the administration of some of my country, but more so because I have always believed in and practiced the laws, and the principles behind those laws, of my country. That certainly makes me a lot more American than some of my fellow citizens.

When I resent something, I always try to do as much as I can about it, in order not to become frustrated. So when Pearl Buck paid me the great compliment of inviting me to do this book with her, I jumped at the opportunity.

I understood very well what she meant when she said she had been exposed in China to a different type of civilization, another sense of values—especially human values. In quite another way I too had been exposed to a different type of civilization in Africa, another set of values in Russia, and had wrestled with these matters theoretically in my studies in anthropology. I had lived abroad for twelve years, especially in England and all over the Continent, and had observed and experienced many different stages of development, and lack of development, in human relations. All of my people at some time or other—most of them all the time—have been victims of improper human relations.

I had come to feel that my own survival and progress as a human being, the survival of my people, and the survival of the world, depend in the final analysis upon awareness of and practicing decent, reasonable human relations. And I had very reluctantly come to the further conclusion that my own countrymen, the rich, powerful, sometimes generously and kindly intentioned Americans, were perhaps, of all the people in the world, least aware of the significance and importance of the practice of such human relations.

Now today, in these frightening days of 1948, I feel sure of one shining truth that is at present very much hidden under the bushel of loud continuous propaganda—the truth that the peace of our world depends upon whether or not we Americans are going to stop ranting and panting and worrying about other less important and complicated unrewarding matters and turn our attention and efforts toward the important, rewarding business of improving our human relations. If we Americans begin



## FOREWORD

here and now to practice Americanism as it is laid down in our beautiful and famous freedom documents, if we treat all Americans—and the people of the world—as human beings to be accepted (we have to accept them anyway; there they are), studied, understood, considered, respected as human beings, regardless of race, color, sex or religious, political, economic, or cultural systems, then we will have surely laid the solid foundation for peace—peace within our individual selves, peace in our country, and peace in the world.

I therefore accepted happily and humbly the challenge Pearl laid down, that I participate with her in an *American Argument*.

## AMERICAN ARGUMENT



# I

## *How We Were Born and Grew*

IT IS A CURIOUS AND FASCINATING EXPERIENCE TO have been born in a certain place and then soon after birth carried across seas to another land, there to grow, to learn to talk and think and read, to find one civilization with parents and another with friends and contemporaries, and then after some forty years to return again to the land of birth. The birth is important. I can imagine a man from Mars coming to America and viewing it with wonder and enjoyment but with complete detachment. But I am concerned, in the midst of wonder and enjoyment, for although I lived those forty years in China, I was born here in America. It is my business to understand my country, perhaps also my duty. Certainly it is my pleasure.

At first it seemed simple. We Americans present a fine outer surface. We are warm, friendly, cordial for a span of one to fifty minutes even to those we dislike. We enjoy play, we like to gamble, we are interested in sports and sex. We are not much interested in education of the sounder sort. We think when we know something about anything that we know all there is to know, or at least we know enough. We are mentally jacks-of-all-trades. We learn how to talk about something, anything, so as not to be conversationally barren. I read in a popular magazine that girls should learn how to talk well on many subjects because boys do not like "dumb bunnies." This advice was partly contradicted later in the article by other advice

## AMERICAN ARGUMENT

against talking too much. It seems that the best technique is to talk enough to help the other person to talk.

So, for various reasons, if I had written a book about my country within the first five years of my stay here, it would have been an easy task, easy and fluent. Unfortunately, I have waited too long. This book will be neither easy nor fluent. It will be a labored, searching, rambling book, asking many questions and giving few answers. I could not even write it by myself. I went and found another American to write it with me. Perhaps two Americans are not enough. I should have hunted up a hundred or so. But a book is a limited thing. I let it go at an American different from myself in as many ways as I can imagine, except that I hope, humbly, that I am as good an American as she is. Difference I wanted, because America is full of differences, but we had to have certain equalities, or else the start would not be even.

Eslanda Robeson, who is the wife of Paul Robeson, has certain superiorities. She is younger than I am and I think she is better looking. My favorite complexion for man or woman is a warm brown and she has it. I also like dark eyes and hair and she has those. She has a strong figure and fine hands. White people nearly always have ugly hands, but the dark peoples of the earth nearly always have beautiful hands. I have often wondered why it is so. Chinese hands are exquisite. I have known only one Chinese woman who did not have beautiful hands. The hands of India are made for expressive use, and so are the hands of Africans.

Aside from the physical superiorities of Eslanda, we are fairly equal. We are reasonably successful women, both self-confident because life has treated us well, although we have worked hard in our separate ways to persuade it to do so. Both of us are without fear of life or death, or of men or women. Long ago we learned to stand on our own feet. We are both Americans and we love it. Nothing could persuade us to be anything else. America has been kind to us.

There is no inferiority complex in either of us. On the other hand, since each of us has a lively and sometimes overweening sense of humor, neither of us has a superiority complex. We both enjoy people, books, music, travel, children, home, and work.

It seemed to me, after knowing many women, that Eslanda best fulfilled my need to find some one with a fine mind, the ability to laugh, a triumphant person in herself so that there would be no inner morbidities, and above all, an American who had lived here most of her life and yet had been abroad enough to know that no one country makes the world.

There was no reason why I should choose a woman rather than a man, except that, usually, one finds all these qualities in higher degree in an intelligent woman than in a man. Such women have to learn to live content in spite of being women, and this, if there is a fountain of humor in the midst of dry intelligence, produces a philosophy which is necessary when one contemplates life in America. It does not do to get excited about one's family or one's fellow countrymen. One must take them as they come.

It may be asked why there should be another book about America. The answer is simple. Some books are written for others to read, some are written for the clarification of one's own mind. This one is written for the clarification of my mind about my own country.

Eslanda gave me great help. Every time I began a sentence by saying, "In our country," which I did at least once every half hour, she stopped me firmly, "Which country?" she demanded. "Your America and mine are not the same." At first I found this interruption irritating. To define one's terms before one gets a chance to talk is to put a bridle on a horse. But I soon learned to be grateful for it. When I speak of America I have to define my terms because there isn't one America. Maybe there isn't any America at all. Maybe we are just a hodgepodge of people living upon one piece of earth through the accident of

## AMERICAN ARGUMENT

wandering forefathers. They came here and spawned us and died, leaving us without ancestry. To go back five or six generations doesn't mean a real ancestry. My friend Sung Shih-hsing goes back seventy generations in his modest way. Maybe we are fish out of water.

Anyway, here we are.

Eslanda lives in New England. I have always forgotten to ask her why. I suppose it is because there she can bring up young Pauli without having to bother about people who do not like brown skin. I live in Pennsylvania because it has a good climate for roses. I have always grown roses wherever I was, and my part of this state has the right combination of humidity and warmth. Only Japanese beetles keep it from being rose perfection.

Both Eslanda and I came from the South. Both of us know we do not want to live there or bring up our children there, and for the same reason. It is too tiresome to have to remember what color we are. Being as absent-minded as writers are reported to be, I would assuredly often walk into a door marked "Colored" or sit down on a seat where white people are not allowed. I have a large family of lively children, and it would be a great burden to remind them all the time what color they are. Eslanda would have the same problem, with added burdens. So we live where we can feel free, most of the time. This perhaps is as much as Americans can expect.

But our families on both sides, Eslanda's and mine, are from the South. She was born and grew up in Washington, D.C., and I was born in a big white house built by my Dutch great-grandfather in a beautiful rich spot which was Virginia when he bought it. Later, after a civil war which tried to settle by military force questions that are not settled yet, the place was over the border of Virginia and became West Virginia. I am glad I was born after the change. I feel that I escaped a good deal, though I cannot define just what—perhaps only tradition.

I began to write this book one hot summer day. Eslanda and I met in New York at a spot halfway between our homes, and we sat down in my small office, face to face. She looked cool and handsome. Brown skin is cooler than white. As a white child among Chinese children I was always hotter in summer than they were. White skin draws the heat for some reason. Eslanda had on a smart dress and hat and it was a pleasure to look at her. Everything about her looked suitable, and that in itself is cooling on a hot day.

She waited attentively for me to begin. I never know how to begin. Life goes on in its endless waves, one wave breaking while the other gathers and rises to its crest, and shall one plunge into the foam and the spray, or into the smooth tide?

"What do you think when you think about being born in America?" I asked.

She accepted the plunge. "When I think about being born in America, I remember that I am officially described on my birth certificate as 'child, female, colored.' In the United States that earmarks a baby for discrimination, segregation, and injustice throughout life. Unless our society wants and intends to do something against babies because of their color, there is no reason to mark them down as colored or white."

I had plunged into the foam and the spray. It was cold and refreshing on a hot day. Then I saw Eslanda's famous smile and then she laughed. "But the absurdity of this mean little custom of the Health Department is revealed in the birth certificate of my son, Pauli, who was born in the Long Island College Hospital in Brooklyn, on November the second, 1927. By mistake he was listed as 'white,' although he is the son of known Negro parents! This technical error of a clerk has been the cause of much hilarity among our friends, because Pauli is a lovely brown color, obviously Negro. When we talk about segregation and discrimination, Pauli often says jokingly, 'They can't



## AMERICAN ARGUMENT

do anything to me—I'm white. My birth certificate says so, and that's official.' "

That was worth a laugh from both of us and we paid in full.

What does one first remember from childhood? I had gentle memories. I was a white child in a land of brown people, and they were all kind people, at least to me. I have no memory of ever seeing an angry brown face or of hearing a harsh Chinese voice directed toward me in my childhood. It is true that I gathered a general impression that the Chinese considered blue eyes unfortunate, since obviously everybody else had black eyes, but nobody hated me for this or called me names. Well, hardly ever was I called names. Occasionally when I was taken to the city, some distance from our country home, the naughty street children called me "little foreign devil." When I was small this made me cry, and my tears always roused my Chinese nurse to fly at the persecutors, and the passers-by took an interest and scolded the other children and begged me not to mind, saying that those others had no manners, and then they pressed sweets upon me to comfort me. Later I learned to reply with strong Chinese curses, to the admiration of the populace. By the time I grew up I had ceased to care, knowing that most people around me, a million to one, were well mannered and courteous.

When I told Eslanda this she looked thoughtful. "One of the earliest things I remember," she said, "is playing with a little boy who lived across the street from us in Washington. We lived in a mixed neighborhood then—it was about the year 1900. The boy was white but I had not yet realized that there was any color difference between us. I'm afraid I, too, was a very independent, even sassy child, and I always defended what I considered were my rights. I still do! One day while we were playing I wanted my turn at something—a game or a toy, I don't remember exactly what it was. I had waited for my turn,

but he wouldn't let me have it. I insisted and he got angry and called me a 'nigger.' I asked what that meant. He said it meant something bad—and something black. That infuriated me, for I knew I wasn't bad and I wasn't black. I pushed him and then chased him home. His mother asked me why we were fighting and I told her what he had called me and that I was going to kill him if he called me any more bad names. I must have been about four or five."

"But did you mind when you went home and looked at yourself in the mirror?" I asked.

Voice and face were tranquil when Eslanda answered, "No, I've always been comfortable in myself."

My childhood home had been on a hill above the Yangtze River. I was alone and yet never lonely. A younger brother died when I was four, and a sister was born when I was seven. I grieved for one and welcomed the other, but I was never unhappy alone. There was too much to do and to see and to think about. It was a secure life on the whole, secure in beauty and in family affection, and even in physical ways. We were poor, I knew vaguely, for the children of "ministers of the gospel" cannot be rich, but I did not know the difference between our kind of poverty and riches. We had a pleasant house and enough food, and in the long warm summers the fewer clothes I could wear the happier I was. And yet deep in my heart, I know now, there came to be an insecurity. We were a white family living among a brown people.

They were kind to us and I had a happy childhood. Yet in that same year of 1900 when Eslanda first was told about her color by a white boy in Washington, I had my first great fear in China. White people there were being killed by brown people. They were being killed because some white people had done great wrong to Chinese, and anyone who was white stood in danger because of what a few bad white people had done. To the north of us missionaries were killed, good people who had come to

serve the brown people in the only way white people knew—by telling them that ours was the best religion and the best education and the best medicine, and by offering to share these goods with the Chinese. The missionaries, within their limitations, had done no harm, but they were killed and with them their little children who were entirely innocent. To me, then eight years old, it was a frightful revelation that children could be killed because of their parents, who in turn were killed because somewhere far away other and entirely strange white people had been cruel and wicked. From that day on I felt less secure in my life. If such a thing could happen in China, where little children were much loved, it could happen anywhere.

"Eslanda," I asked, "did you feel secure in Washington?"

She hesitated. "Our family felt secure in some ways, at least. Physically we were comfortable—I suppose because we didn't want a lot of things. My father died when I was small and my mother went to work. She learned beauty work and specialized in facial massage and became quite expert at it. She was able to bring us all up and educate us, my two brothers and myself. In 1905 we came to New York and lived in a cold-water railroad flat."

My curiosity was aroused and in my ignorance I asked, "Was it called a railroad flat because it was near the railroad?"

Eslanda took time out for a good laugh at me. "No, it was called that because the rooms opened into each other without a hall, like a train of cars."

I joined her laughter and then she went on. "Still, I got my first ideas of luxury from that flat! The bathroom was at one end, next the kitchen, and I used to have to wait my turn for it. I said then that when I got rich we'd all have our own bathrooms. It is still my idea of luxury and we do each have one."

We did not have so many bathrooms in our house in

China, either. We had one, which was considered quite a marvel. It was only a little room with a big sink under the tin tub. My father had showed a Chinese tinsmith how to make the tub and then he had it painted white inside and green outside. We were all proud of it.

But whatever we had, I was always taught that education was the most important thing in life. To want to learn, to learn in order to understand what was right and what was wrong, this was the atmosphere of my American home and of the homes of my Chinese friends. My heritage was of learned men and women. My father's family was one of scholars, speaking many languages and digging deep into Hebrew and Greek and Sanskrit. My mother's family was a brilliant one. We found congenial air in China, where learning is always revered.

"What did your mother teach you was the most important thing in life?" I asked Eslanda.

"Education," she said promptly. "We all felt it essential and we were lucky in having it. My father was one of the first Negroes to graduate from Northwestern University. My grandfather on my mother's side was educated in Scotland, at Glasgow University, and founded Avery Institute, the first school for Negroes in South Carolina. He was the Francis Lewis Cardozo who is mentioned in the history of reconstruction and in Howard Fast's novel, *Freedom Road*. My grandfather believed that Negroes, with everyone else, must have a good education."

Education, then, was part of the American creed for good living. We all believe in it. But what sort of education? Mine might have been called haphazard. In the midst of a life busy with concern for many responsibilities, my mother took time to teach me what were called "lessons." I learned the how if not the why of arithmetic. I read everything anyway, and the rest was easy. Eslanda's American education was different.

"I went to the public schools in Washington," she said. "They were segregated and they still are, but I didn't

really understand much until I was about fourteen, and in New York. We were living in Harlem then and one day there was a riot and all children had to go indoors. Looking out of our window, I saw policemen gathered at the corner on the avenue. At first I thought it was a parade but there was a certain tenseness in the air that didn't go with parades. Then the police came into the street in pairs. Bottles and bricks and hot water were thrown at them from the windows and rooftops. I asked people what this was all about and they told me, 'We're sick and tired of these Irish cops beating up Negroes and we're going to teach them a lesson.' We thought all the police in New York were Irish. I learned afterward that trigger-happy or mean white policemen often abused the people in Harlem."

I remembered, when I was about the same age of fourteen, Chinese swarming about some white American sailors on the Bund of a Chinese city. The sailors were partly drunk and one of them had kicked a Chinese. I had not thought of it for years, but it came back to me with terrifying clearness.

"You white men!" a Chinese shouted. "You get drunk—you kick and beat us. White men, no more!"

The crowd shouted, "No more—no more, white men!" My father and mother hurried me away. Then Father went back, and only by pleading and promises did he rescue the Americans. He took them back to their ship, and he would not leave until the captain had promised to sail, for so my father had promised the Chinese he would do.

"Did it leave any fears in you, Eslanda?" I asked.

"The only thing in the world I fear is cats!" she declared.

"Why cats?" I asked, surprised at the swift descent.

"I went to a psychiatrist in Vienna to find out," she said. "It seems when I was a baby, a cat slept on my face, or something."

"What did he tell you to do?" I asked.

"Stay away from cats—which I did anyway," she said. We both laughed again. Eslanda is very easy to laugh with.

She looked at me with thoughtful eyes. "If I know what you mean," she said, "no, I wasn't ever afraid of *that*. Ever since I can remember, I have always been determined never to let anyone push me around. I knew that at any moment I might have to pay for that luxury, but even if I were killed for it, I would not let anyone push me around. This determination has always remained with me. When I was growing up in New York City they used to refuse to serve Negroes in places like Childs', Schrafft's, and the drugstore soda fountains downtown. One day I was shopping and was tired, hot, and thirsty. There were Liggett's soda fountains everywhere. Suddenly the whole thing seemed silly to me, and I made up my mind then and there to go in and have a soda. I just walked in, sat down at the counter and in a firm voice ordered an ice cream soda. I remember very clearly that I ordered vanilla. The counterman looked at me rather strangely, hesitantly, and I looked back at him with what must have been something like murder in my eyes. He gave me the soda, I drank it quietly, and went out feeling better. It was as simple as that. Someday fifteen million Negroes are going to do that very thing and it will be the end of segregation. There are times when many of us just feel we can't take any more."

I know that feeling. Sometimes I feel it because I am a woman. Mine is not a very good country for women. I shall keep coming back to this because it is something I do not fully understand, and I keep trying to understand why it is that the privileged and often petted and spoiled American woman should not be allowed equality with men in jobs, in politics, in everything, since we believe in democracy. Maybe the reason is that she does not seize it and maybe the reason for this is that she does not

want the responsibility. Anyway, nobody gives her equality.

Eslanda went on. "Another incident I remember in this matter of not being pushed around was my experience with a robber. Paul, his accompanist, Larry, and I had come here from England for a concert tour. As usual, I took care of the money, paid rail fares, hotel bills, and so on. I remember drawing several thousand dollars in cash from the Guaranty Trust Company on upper Fifth Avenue to cover expenses of the cross-country tour. It was during the depression, and the people in this country were greatly disorganized. I walked down Fifth Avenue window-shopping, went into Altman's where I bought a bridge table for a friend, some lingerie and stockings, then left the store by a different door, the one on Thirty-fifth Street. As I walked toward the avenue a strange white man stepped up beside me, elbowed me violently against the plate-glass window of the store, and said, 'Give me the money!' In an emergency many thoughts pass swiftly through the mind. I thought, in what must have been a matter of seconds, this man must have followed me from the bank, down the avenue, and all through the store. This money isn't mine, it's Paul's and Larry's. I simply can't give it to him—the very idea! I won't give it to him!

"The next thing I remember is that I heard some woman far away yelling at the top of her lungs, 'How dare you! I won't give it to you!' I thought, what a loud and vulgar voice! The woman was me—it was my voice! I had seized the man, thrown him down, and was jumping on him, yelling furiously to an astonished and sympathetic crowd. Passers-by thought he had assaulted me, and stood around to see him get his just deserts. Someone called a policeman, who quieted me, saying, 'It's all right, lady, whatever he did, he won't do it again.' He took the battered man in charge. I collected myself and continued shopping.

"I have never been aggressive and am not now. But I

have never been meek. I am convinced that meekness invites pushing around, and brings out the worst in people, brings out the bully quality. I have never in my life started a fight, but I have always defended myself vigorously. I learned jiu-jitsu so as to defend myself in whatever emergency I might find myself. I value my human dignity much more highly than I value my physical life." She sat calmly enough while she talked, but her dark eyes were burning bright.

When I was a young girl I went for a year or so to a girls' school where I was the only white-skinned pupil. Most of the time I forgot I was white, because nobody else thought of it, or if they did, they never told me so.

"Did you grow up unconscious of your color, too?" I asked Eslanda.

"Most of the time, when I was little," she said. "I think I became really conscious of my color when the question of what I was to study came up in high school. The adviser suggested that I take domestic science. I think she suggested that because I was colored. I thought it was pretty silly, because I felt I knew all about housekeeping, having kept house for our little family for several years while my mother went out to work at her facial massage. I finished high school in three years, and was at a graduation party in Chicago when I met a nice boy who rather interested me. I was sixteen. I was disappointed when he said he had to leave the party early, since he was going to take the scholarship examinations for the University of Illinois the following day. I asked him all about the exams, and he not only gave me the details, but suggested that I take them, too. I went home and told Mama. She said quietly, 'I think you'd better study tonight and brush up for the exams.' She fixed a special supper for me, with coffee, and stayed up with me. I took the exams the next day. I came out third on the list and won a scholarship. There were only three. The nice boy came out fourth, and missed. I felt badly about that, I remember! Later,



## AMERICAN ARGUMENT

when I went to apply for entrance to the university with my scholarship, I was told I was not eligible. The first thing that crossed my mind was that I was being refused because I was Negro. I was determined to get in, or else tear the school down brick by brick. I was told that I didn't have four years of high school, which were required. I said I had made all my points in three years, had won the scholarship fairly, and they ought to be glad to have a student who could finish high school in three years instead of four. They did accept me, and I took domestic science. After my second year I became bored with it and decided to quit college. Mama would not hear of it, however. I had a sensible adviser at college, and she asked me what subjects I liked. The only one I really enjoyed was chemistry. My adviser said, 'Why don't you specialize in chemistry?' This seemed a wonderful idea, so I took chemistry."

"Did it occur to you that you might have difficulty in finding work in chemistry when you finished school?" I asked.

"No, because two of my very good Negro friends were chemists. However, they were men, and it did occur to me that there were very few women in chemistry. I took my senior year at Teachers College, Columbia University. Then came the question of getting a job. My adviser at Columbia, a very fine professor and a woman, recommended me highly for a position at Presbyterian Hospital in New York. This had always been a man's job, and so far as I know, up to that time no Negro had ever worked at Presbyterian, not even as a porter or maid. But this was wartime, the First World War, and personnel was scarce. They hired me, a woman and a Negro.

"But they never had any discriminatory policy toward patients, and I remember one of the reasons I was proud to work there was because they had a bronze plate on the face of the building stating that they welcomed patients without regard to race, creed, or color. I knew that, as the

'first,' I would be considered an example of my race and sex, and that was a great responsibility—if I didn't do well at my job, it would not mean that I as an individual person was incapable, lazy, stupid, or irresponsible; it would mean that Negroes and women were incapable, lazy, stupid, or irresponsible. All Negroes, and many women, have to bear this burden, especially those who are 'first' at anything."

The vigor in Eslanda's story made my own leisurely years in college in a southern town seem idle. Still, they were the years when I first understood something of the human divisions in my country. No, I didn't understand them—I merely learned of them. Now at the distance of all these years I see that the Negroes in the little city of Lynchburg made no impression on me. We were not allowed to go downtown on Saturday nights, ostensibly because it was the night when the colored folk were all out. Actually it was because there were nine saloons along the few blocks of Main Street and drunk white men were proportionately as many as colored ones. The population was about ten colored to one white. Actually, too, I was much more afraid of one white drunk man than of ten colored ones; partly because white men are meaner and more filthy when they are drunk than most colored persons are, and partly because of those memories of drunk white sailors near my childhood home in China.

"What was your work?" I asked Eslanda.

"I was chemist and technician in the Surgical Pathology Department, and I made microscopic cross sections of tissues taken from patients in the operating rooms. There was quite a lot of traffic in my laboratory, which was immediately next to the operating rooms, and I had to meet and get along with many people—nurses, surgeons, internes. Although no one said anything, nearly everyone thought it strange that a woman, and a Negro woman at that, should be there. But I resolutely ignored this, I be-

## AMERICAN ARGUMENT

haved naturally and comfortably, and soon every one came to take me for granted.

"And Americans being what they are, extremely silly in this matter of prejudice, a strange situation arose. Because I never behaved differently from anyone else, and would not allow anyone to treat me differently, they all came to think of me in some way as not Negro, even though I am obviously Negro in color, hair, and so on. But I did not behave according to their absurd ideas of Negroes, and so they decided I must be 'an exception.' This kind of thing has always annoyed me and amused me, because it is so ridiculous. Many white Americans think that American Negroes are black, smelly, lazy, stupid, and immoral. Any Negroes who are not—and millions of them are not any of these things—are *exceptions!*

"I remember clearly a young Southerner who was an interne at Presbyterian while I was there. I was always cheerful and friendly—in a definitely reserved way—with the staff as a whole, but when I heard his thick Southern accent I decided to be even more reserved than usual with him. He soon forgot all about my color and took my presence in his stride. Until one evening . . . Paul, whom I had recently married, had come into the hospital to have his tonsils removed. I had gone up to the ward to say good night to him, and kissed him just as the Southern doctor came into the room. The doctor turned scarlet with anger at the spectacle of me kissing this big dark man. There was nothing personal in his reaction. He was not at all interested in me as a woman. He had somehow rearranged in his mind not his general Southern attitude toward Negroes as a whole, but his attitude toward me in particular, as 'different' and an 'exception.' Now here I was, spoiling it all, confusing the issue, and upsetting his rearrangement by kissing this big Negro, who, very fortunately for me, happened to be my husband!"

We both laughed again. Then I asked, "Did you go to public school?"

"Yes, I went to a mixed public school, white with only a few colored children."

I was not ready to leave Eslanda's childhood, so different from my own in China. Mine was a dreamy pleasant time, the years passing in peace. I did not know, any more than the quiet country folk about me knew, that tremendous upheavals were taking place in the subterranean depths of the vast old country upon whose beautiful surface we lived so happily. The revolution was to break in 1911, under the leadership of a fiery willful young man named Sun Yat-sen, himself the son of a farmer. None of us knew him in my part of China. For us the old empress still sat secure upon her throne in far-off Peking, and she was, or seemed to be, as stable as the Heaven above us, in which we vaguely trusted. The God of my fathers was less real to me than the beneficent Chinese Heaven, which spread over all mankind alike. In our life there was no competition, no struggle, no striving. The only competitive spirit I ever saw was sometimes on the faces of rich ladies playing mah-jongg in the homes of a few of my Chinese playmates, or the same look on the faces of the common gamblers on a Yangtze River steamship. Except for the gambling instinct, which is strong in most Chinese, life seemed to be without competition. Perhaps even the gambling was not so much competition as a profound interest in fate. I never saw anger or quarreling or a fight over the bamboo pieces. A ruined man rose pale from the table and sauntered away. He did not kill himself—I never heard of that. He waited for better fate and until he could gather together a few pieces of money.

The competition upon which American life seems to be based is therefore something that I do not understand. I am bad at games, because I have no interest in winning. If I win it is a matter of luck. I dislike the feeling of hav-

## AMERICAN ARGUMENT

ing any sort of victory over another person. I am happiest when there is a tie—or happier perhaps when there is no game at all.

Eslanda is competitive. I can feel in her the spirit of struggle and the love of victory. Sometimes I think she is the most American person I know.

The competitive spirit is taught our children very young indeed. I know that athletics and sports are an essential part of our national life. The reasons given for this are various—physical exercise, good sportsmanship, the moral equivalent of war, and so forth. Actually, I wonder whether most of these benefits could not be found in some noncompetitive way. The fierce competition of sports pervades all aspects of our life. The biggest, the first, are questions on every school child's mind. The competitive spirit has made us a nation of vain and arrogant victors and poor losers.

As for the moral equivalent of war, there is no such thing. There can be no moral equivalent of so thoroughly immoral a procedure as war. One day hence, when war is obsolete, the human race will look back on the people of this age as stupid savages. I have seen wars again and again, and every time I am filled with the same wonder at the incredible folly of man. I speak my wonder freely and keep silent only in the presence of the marred and battered wrecks of young men who have been sacrificed. In mercy they must be allowed the illusion that the sacrifice was worth something, at least. It does not do for a man to think, when his face is shot away or his legs gone to the hips or his hands replaced by metal hooks.

So I doubt the good of competitive sports. The spirit of competition needs to be educated out of men and women. Free enterprise will be a sounder foundation for our democracy if it is based upon the spirit of co-operation and mutual benefit rather than upon the savage and destructive instincts of competition.

"You had a happy childhood?" I asked Eslanda.

"Yes, it was marvelous," she replied.

"What did you do outside of school?"

"I usually played with the boys. I was very athletic, a good swimmer, good at games, and was more their kind. I thought girls were sissies, and I always played with the boys because they seemed to have more fun."

"Did you feel yourself different from other girls of your age?"

"I felt I was a little rough-and-ready, tomboyish, and felt a little self-conscious in purely social gatherings, especially at dances, where the girls all tried to be very feminine. But when Mama found out I was self-conscious at dances, she found a dancing teacher for me."

"Were you just Mama's child? What about your father and relatives?"

"Father came from the West to Washington to become a government clerk—he was a clerk in the War Department. My father was a dark man, and Mama and her family are very fair. When she married a dark man, some of her relatives thought it was wrong. And when I married Paul, they said, 'Like mother, like daughter!' There is some color prejudice among Negroes, even today. It is ridiculous, and a pity. In some cities, like Washington and Charleston, Negroes have what we call a 'lily-white' society."

"Can you get in if you are black?"

"You can if you are in a profession, or have lots of money."

"Can a poor light person get in?"

"Light people are automatically in."

Who set the world fashion, I wonder, in white skin? Even in China they like a fair skin—not with light hair or eyes, though! The blacker the hair and eyes the better, but with a light skin the combination spells beauty. Yet white people are getting themselves brown as fast as pos-

## AMERICAN ARGUMENT

sible, with the aid of sun and lamps and lotions. Who sets the fashions? Couldn't they be set internationally, by a Committee of Colors? They might decide that the color of beauty for brown and white folks was to be a little lighter than life for the dark, a little darker than life for the light. It would be the same color.

## II

### *Youth and Old Age*

ESLANDA WAS LOOKING VERY WELL WHEN NEXT WE met. She was wearing one of her dresses from Callott Sœurs, a Paris firm that really creates clothes for the individual woman. Eslanda is not extravagant, but she believes in getting what she wants, and she takes care to want the right thing.

"Do you like clothes?" I asked.

"Yes, although I feel about clothes as I do about make-up," she replied. "I like them, but they take a lot of time and money, if you make a career of them. I'd rather make a career of something more solid, and pick up the clothes and make-up later on, or in my off time. They can be picked up very easily. But it is typically American to work on the exterior and not on the interior."

Eslanda is lucky in having an intelligent interior and a pleasant exterior. She looked so competent and able a woman as she sat there in her handsome frock that I could not forbear saying, "It is not so easy to be a woman in America, I think! Nobody helps a woman to be a woman. Every page of a magazine tries to sell her something but nobody really helps her. Think of all the women who worry about whether they'll get married! Did you have to work to get Paul?"

"Of course," Eslanda said calmly.

"But you were sensible and had good luck because you were pretty!"



"I wasn't pretty," she declared. "I was short and thick, so I had to make myself—well, interesting!"

"Did you mind not being pretty?"

"It didn't worry me at all. There were so many other things I could be—athletic, a good companion, gay, appreciative. I knew that you must convince the man you want to marry that you are not especially interested in marriage. Once you get him, of course, you must let him go if you want to hold him—let him go, but all the while you must make life and home as attractive, interesting, and comfortable as possible. A man stays, not because he is held, but because he wants to stay."

"Does the average American man want to get married?"

"Of course any normal man wants to get married. But our women besiege men too much, and the men feel victimized. The American girl oversells herself as a woman and that's the reason she has such a hard time getting rid of herself."

The attitude of women toward marriage varies in different countries. In China, where women have always had to marry, more than a few women in this generation do not want to marry. They want time to explore life for themselves as individuals and not as women. Childbearing has been the chief function of the Chinese woman for many thousands of years. Now she often wants to be free for a generation or so. In England, to take another old country, women know that many of them can never marry because there are not enough men now. The sensible attitude for women there is to prepare for a life without marriage and to be grateful if the opportunity comes.

The result is that both Chinese and English women are better as individual human beings than American women are, more integrated, more informed, and more important in society. Here in our country women have a notion, left over from pioneer days, I suppose, that they still have the value of rarity. It is not true. Moreover, with our men stirring around the world the way they do nowadays,

American women have to face competition abroad as well as at home. It does not work both ways, for American women have a bad reputation abroad. They are considered good-looking, but spoiled and uninteresting. Foreign men think long before marrying them.

"Why does the American woman feel she has to get married?" I asked Eslanda.

"Because otherwise public opinion would call her names," she replied promptly.

"Did you feel you had to get married?" I inquired.

"No, I didn't. I wasn't married until I was twenty-five. I did not marry until I found a man who attracted and interested me, whom I thought I could love, and with whom I thought I wanted to spend the rest of my life."

"When you fell in love as a woman, you—made efforts?"

"I didn't even know I was falling in love. We had fun together, were happy together, had many interests in common, so I decided to do something about it. Paul was so popular with everyone that it was quite a problem. I decided on a campaign."

"Did you ever tell him about the campaign?"

"About ten years afterwards!"

"Did he feel the same finality about you?" I asked.

"No," she said honestly.

"Would you say that is typical of the American man?"

"Yes."

"Why are they so?"

"Because they are just stupid about marriage, I suppose."

"Why should they be more stupid than women?"

"They just don't seem to bother."

"Why don't they?" I persisted.

"Because they can get women so easily. Women seem to be vulnerable, married or single."

"Doesn't that give women a sense of instability?"

"I'm sure it does."

"Aren't women lonely?"

## AMERICAN ARGUMENT

"I think so. That's why you see them in herds. You see them at theaters, at luncheon, tea and dinner places, together. It's pathetic. You seldom see women herding like that abroad."

"Perhaps women are too clever for men?" I suggested.

"I don't think so," she replied. "There is just not enough done about the relationship between men and women, so there's no particular reason for them to be together. Women have to work at being attractive to men; clothes and make-up are not enough. Men have to work at being interesting and attractive to women; flowers, jewels, fur coats, or any other gifts are not enough. It takes conscious thought and effort. But we don't bother. American men and women spend their thoughts and energies on making money, acquiring things, achieving fame, keeping up with The Joneses. It is not going too far to say that some American men and women marry partners, not because they are in love, but because the partners will be assets in the national game of 'getting ahead.' It is all a part of our general picture of making money and having what is called a good time. It never seems to occur to the average American that the greatest success in life is to be able to realize one's self in terms of one's own physical and psychological needs. These needs are highly individual, of course."

"Let's talk about opportunity," I said. "As an American, do you feel that there is unlimited opportunity here for anybody of any color?"

"I think there could be," Eslanda said promptly, "but I think you have to insist on having the opportunity, and when you get it, you have to deliver. There are a lot of people here in this country actively and successfully preventing other people from getting normal opportunity."

I pondered this for a bit. I cannot imagine anybody preventing Eslanda from getting anything she wants. I believe that if she had the chance to be born again into her own choice, she would still be herself. There would doubtless

be points at which she would like less difficulty. She might, for all I know, prefer to be tall and slim. But I do not believe it would occur to her to want to be white.

"Have we Americans real race prejudice?"

"No, I don't think so," she said. "The reason I think we haven't is because there are too many organized efforts to create it, and to keep it up. We have to make Jim Crow laws and insist upon them; we have to have real-estate agreements and insist on them. It takes alert, consistent effort to preserve this so-called race prejudice, which is really economic at base. It is to the economic interest of persons or groups, mostly economic groups, to keep up these barriers of race. They have to work hard to keep them up, because the barriers are artificial, not real or natural. Prejudice is not innate, it is not inherited; it is taught, it is acquired."

This was Eslanda the successful woman speaking. But how had Eslanda the girl felt?

"Let's go back to the time when you were in high school," I said. "During those years, what did you want to be when you grew up?"

"I thought I wanted to be a doctor."

"Why weren't you?"

"I think I really wanted to be some sort of scientist. I became very much interested in chemistry, and then went on to medical chemistry. I gave that up when Paul and I started to travel. You have to stay put in a laboratory if you want to work at chemistry."

"When did you meet Paul?"

"I met him in 1920, in Harlem. All the girls were swarming about him because he was a football hero, Phi Beta Kappa, very handsome, but friendly and unspoiled. I thought since all the girls were making such a fuss over him, I would try being casual and indifferent. It was just one of those things—it worked."

"When did you get married?"

"After my first year in medical school."

## AMERICAN ARGUMENT

"Did you feel you were giving up anything in being married? A career, maybe?"

"It never crossed my mind."

"Did it cross Paul's mind?"

"No, I don't think so. One day we just decided to get married. We'd heard about people going to Greenwich, Connecticut, to marry, and so we went there. The man at the license bureau told us to come back in five days. We felt a little silly. Then Paul said we could be married in New York State without waiting, so we went down to Rye on an interurban streetcar, and were married immediately. After we got back to the city, we stood for a few minutes on the popular corner of 135th Street and Seventh Avenue, talking. A friend of ours, a dentist whose office was on the second floor of the corner building, leaned out of his window and called down to us, 'What are you two up to?' And I remember saying to Paul, 'Wouldn't he like to know?'

"The next Christmas we decided to announce it. We hadn't made a home because we couldn't afford to, I suppose. Paul was a law student, and I, having given up the medical course, had gone back to work at the laboratory at Presbyterian Hospital. When our friends saw that we seemed to be 'going together,' one or two went to Paul and told him he was making a mistake, that I was a 'fast New York woman.' This amused Paul, even while he resented it, of course, because actually he knew I was rather fastidious. Others came to me and told me that I was making a mistake, that football players never made anything of themselves later in life, that Paul hung around night clubs, and so on. This amused me, because Paul was always trying to take me to the night clubs to listen to the music and the singers. So we decided to save everybody a lot of embarrassment, and announced our marriage. It happened that both Paul's fraternity and my sorority were holding their annual conventions during the holidays in Philadel-

phia. We both attended our respective conventions and announced our marriage there."

"Then where did you live?"

"On 138th Street, west of Eighth Avenue. We got a nice big room on the top floor of an old house, and fixed it up like a bed-sitting room. We had a sort of washroom wardrobe, a pantry closet adjoining the room, and we made ourselves very comfortable."

"Are you typical?" I now asked Eslanda.

"No, I don't think so," she said frankly. "I think in those days the average American didn't get married unless he had a home of some sort. Many of them would have been ashamed to live in one room."

"Should people get married early?"

"I think the Africans have the final answer to that: people should sleep together, make a home together, when the feeling comes. When they feel very strongly the urge to do so, that is the time."

I had continually to adapt myself to Eslanda's Americanism. If I had to find a synonym for this Americanism I would use the word individualism. In the China in which I had grown up a wedding was strictly a family affair. A boy and a girl were betrothed after much thought and consultation between parents. The girl had to fit into the family. It was also well if she pleased the boy but it was almost secondary. Perhaps it would be more truthful to say that if she suited the family she would make the boy happy because there would be peace between him and his parents. It was essential to the well-being of all that the new wife should not separate the boy from his family, but should cement the whole group together for the next generation. This was the purpose of marriage, and economics came second. Chinese parents would not have thought of asking their son to support his wife. In the first place he would be too young, probably in the middle of his education. The young couple shared the general home. It was much more important that the boy be married when he

was young, before his youthful passion led him to complications with women, than that he should be earning money. In China prostitutes are supported mainly by older men who want variety, not by young ones who want experience.

No system is entirely satisfactory. In recent times young Chinese rebelled against the parental system, and began to choose for themselves in the Western fashion. This extreme phase again passed when they found that their choices did not turn out well, either, and that parents were reluctant to support girls they had not chosen. A modification between the two systems is now taking place.

I think, however, having observed the young in many countries and now my own, that our way is certainly not entirely satisfactory. I feel sorry for American girls. Many of them are pretty, and these get husbands easily, but more of them are not pretty and have a hard time to get any at all. Perhaps, things being as they are, the ugly girls should go to plastic surgeons and get themselves remodeled into what young men like. It would remove the strain from their lives and would allow those in professions to keep their minds on their work. The Chinese are right to this extent. Biology should come first and economics later. For Americans, it seems to me, economics always comes first and people manage as best they can biologically. This makes for social confusion.

This confusion is intensified because American women are strangely unwilling to acknowledge that they must and do grow old. At first, being accustomed to a civilization where age adds honor to both men and women, I thought that only unmarried women in the United States wished to conceal their age, in the hope of still being marriageable.

"The Chinese woman, except a few modern ones, does not have to struggle as American women do," I told Eslanda. "The husband is provided by the family."

"What a relief for her!" Eslanda cried. "She doesn't

have to get a husband. Imagine! A husband handed to you on a silver platter? That is something!"

"Of course she is told to make herself attractive to her husband," I went on, "but here the woman is not told the day-to-day techniques, but only to be sure and remain young. What does she do in middle age?"

"According to the advertisements," Eslanda replied, laughing, "there is no middle age for American women. Everybody is young and 'on the make.' And as for clothes for her—there is so little choice above size sixteen! What about the rest of us who need larger sizes."

"In China," I said, "perhaps in all old societies, there is the technique of being one's age. A woman of forty moves up, not down. There is a clear definition of how a woman of fifty should act. She receives more deference from others, her husband respects her more and admires her in proportion to her fulfillment. Here a woman of thirty pretends she is twenty-five. She states on public documents 'over 21.' Is she exempt from the laws of nature?"

"Apparently!" Eslanda said cheerfully "This is another of our American pretensions. Although any moron knows that growing older is a law of nature, Americans like to pretend that they reach what they consider a desirable age, and stay there. They not only pretend, but they insist, and say they do. It's infantile. For myself, I just don't think staying young is an ideal to reach for."

"A woman isn't a woman here unless she is young and beautiful," I said. "Of course it applies to business and job as well as marriage. I heard a woman say the other day that she wanted to be a doctor but had given it up because she couldn't have begun practicing until she was thirty. 'At thirty, a man is considered young but a woman is called old,' she said sadly."

"It's pathetic and embarrassing, and a little obscene," Eslanda said with vigor. "You might as well look back to your baby days. They were sweet, too, and cute. It's equally embarrassing with some of our middle-aged Amer-



## AMERICAN ARGUMENT

ican men—you should see them in the Pullmans and the club cars, the perennial college sophomores, telling juvenile stories and horsing around playing practical jokes! Maybe we're just young and silly as a people. Permanent sophomores! We seem to have laid down a tradition that Americans are young and beautiful and successful and terrific. Something should be done about it."

"Maybe women just can't let their dream selves go. But why not?"

"Maybe they haven't found anything to put in place of that dream self," Eslanda suggested. "The average woman is afraid her husband will go after another and younger woman, never one of her own age. I think it must be because she hasn't built up anything solid enough in herself to replace her vanishing youth. I suppose a woman does consider that she has failed to hold her husband, if he goes after someone else. And of course she *has* failed. But she rarely admits failure. Here we are again at our old friend, contradiction. She says, instead, that it is the husband's fault, that he now wants a younger woman. You know the familiar whine, 'He's had the best years of my life, now he wants a younger woman.' I've always found that alibi particularly revolting. If he has had the best years of her life, she has had the best years of his, hasn't she?"

"Does the American man dislike growing old, too?" I asked.

"I think so," Eslanda replied.

"I think so, too. In China the man looks forward to retirement from the time he goes to work. When a man there gets to be fifty he considers his chore is over and he wants the rest of his life to read or garden or relax. The eldest son takes the business over. By the time he is sixty everybody considers he has reached the age of complete wisdom, and his prestige is at its height. The Chinese don't waste their old people as we do. They think they can learn from them and they value their advice. This means that their civilization is more balanced and more mature than

ours. A great deal of our volatility, and the instability of which we are accused so often by other nations, come from the fact that the young control our life, psychologically, if not actually. Incidentally, in China old people are happy, because they feel themselves needed."

"Sounds wonderful," Eslanda said. "What about their span of life?"

"Not so long as ours, but they have about twenty years of fun."

"That's long enough to enjoy it. We do just the opposite. It seems to me, too, that in the United States our older people from sixty on are wasted. It is a shame, because they have the sense and wisdom that we need. It is true, though, that our presidents, generals, Supreme Court judges are older men. If they are older, why is it we don't use older people in consulting positions in business? There is an age when a person should be an adviser."

I asked, "Do you see any need for old age in this country? Is there any place or use generally for the old?"

"Not much," she said frankly. "So, people will not admit they are old until they are practically falling apart. I was shocked to learn about one definite place of usefulness for the old—in politics! Did you know that some of our politicians take the aged into consideration far more than they do children? The aged can vote, and the children cannot. I must say that was a revelation to me."

"What do our people really think about their old?" I asked.

"That they are a nuisance. Maybe they think, wouldn't it be wonderful if they would die when they get old enough to become a nuisance. Maybe they'd like to kill them off," Eslanda replied.

"Yet you have just said they are valuable as political units," I reminded her.

"That doesn't mean that anything is done for them," she said. "We Negroes are no longer surprised to find just before an election that suddenly everybody is interested

## AMERICAN ARGUMENT

in us as a group. There is a lot of talk about giving us our rights, but nothing ever comes of it, and we are no longer misled by it. In the current campaign, for instance, there is an unusual amount of interest being shown in many groups, because this coming election is going to be a hard fight. Truman, who could have done a lot about civil rights along the way, suddenly made a grand gesture in setting up a Civil Rights Commission, and made a lot of capital out of the report of this commission. And there is the elegant report on the state of education in our nation. Reports, reports, commissions, commissions, congressional investigations, and so what? All to impress the veterans, the young people, various minorities! We Negroes are not impressed. We have lived through too many reports and investigations that get nowhere. They have all petered out after elections. Anyway, every fool knows the state of the union. We don't need any more committees, investigations, and reports. What we need is action, correction, and plenty of it, and fast."

"Where did we lose our sense of human relationships?" I asked.

"Maybe we never had it. We began in this country with slavery, remember. It's impossible to develop human relationships, or to keep them if we had them, under slavery. Slavery itself is a violation of human relationships, and sets up false standards.

"When people first came to America, they were interested in finding freedom from oppression for themselves, or in building a better life for themselves, and they are still doing just that, or trying to. So now we are on the merry-go-round of building, building more and bigger houses, cars, telephones, and gadgets. We are obsessed with the making of *things*, and the accumulation of *things* for ourselves. We must make up our minds whether we are going to continue making a full-time career of accumulating more things, or whether we will stop at some reasonable point and examine our human relationships."

Here I interrupted. "Who makes up the minds in a democracy?"

"We, the people, are supposed to. In theory, we sit down and work out what we need, what we want, then select one of ourselves, our representative, to see that we get it. But is that what we do, here in America? No! Here, we have the spectacle of professional politicians saying one thing, and doing another, term after term. So much so that the phrase 'election promises' is well understood by us all. The American people seem to have given over their affairs and the conduct of their country, their lives and future, and now the conduct of world affairs, to these professional politicians. It is a pity! I'm pretty cynical about it all. I say, if that's what the American people want, all right. I'm only one person, and who am I to tell them what they want? Maybe they know. But I do very strongly object to their bleating all over the face of the earth about how democratic they are. Democratic indeed! With our staggering minority problems, with the corruption in our domestic and foreign affairs, and with the politicians, the military, and big business running the country, and trying to run the world, we have the nerve to say we're democratic! What I can never get over is the fact that people all over the world see clearly and understand this state of affairs in American life, but Americans themselves refuse to admit it, and characteristically refuse to face their contradictions."

Perhaps Eslanda is right. Indeed, I think she is. We Americans lack balance and one reason we do is because we have no proper relationship between young and old. Competition does its evil work here, too—competition instead of co-operation.

# III

## *Being Americans*

LIKE MANY AMERICANS, ESLANDA HAD SPOKEN often of her mother and not very often of her father. I had already come to believe that the mother-child relation seems to be the strongest human tie in our American civilization. Men usually are emotionally moved by the thought of mother rather than by father, or even by wife. In the civilization where I had grown up this was not so. The relationships between human beings were defined and clear, and one did not overbalance the other. In the home the Chinese child is not primarily dependent upon the mother for food and care. He does not connect his physical well-being with his mother alone. Other relatives and servants have an active share. Moreover, the child's relationship to father and elder brother, to teacher and friend, are all definite and carry obligation. He must behave in a certain way to each, not as he feels but as he ought.

"Do American children love their mothers too much, Eslanda?"

"They only *know* them better," she retorted, "and the mother knows the child better than the father does, too. I think men should have more to do in the home, with the home, and with the children."

"Why does the boy desert the home when he is grown up?" I asked this because I had early been impressed with how little co-operation there is in the average American

home between man and woman. The man functions outside and the woman inside. This means division. Tracing it back, I discover in the American boy a sense of shame in sharing household activities. Whatever his natural inclinations for cooking and housework, he dare not indulge them lest he be thought effeminate. He is compelled spiritually to desert the home, to consider its work woman's business. He separates himself from home and to that extent from woman.

"I don't think Pauli will. He doesn't now," Eslanda said, confident of her son.

"How have you managed that?"

"I have tried to integrate him into the home. If we're busy, he helps with the beds, the dishes, cleans up the recreation house. He has a lot of company of his own, and I make him help plan for that. He helps with the budget, and I, in turn, help him with his affairs. For instance, if he wants some football practice, he will offer to help me with whatever I am doing, and then I'll go out and give him an hour or two, holding the ball in place for him to try place-kicks, or passing the ball so he can practice catching forward passes on the run. As is usual with growing boys, he eats a lot and often. He adores going to the refrigerator and choosing what he will eat or drink. We laugh and say that he eats every hour on the hour. So I arrange for him to help with the marketing, carrying the heavy loads, checking lists when he eats the last of things or drinks the last bottle of milk or cider, keeping track of prices, and checking the budget. It takes a lot of time and effort to integrate a child into the mechanics of the home, as well as into the current of family life."

"And you think that when Pauli gets his own home he'll be interested in it?"

"Yes, I think he will. He enjoys his home, and enjoys bringing his friends there. He also has a healthy respect for the home. We haven't a set of rules, but we all under-

stand that there are attitudes and behavior that we just don't want in our home."

"Do his parties consist mostly of his college mates?"

"Yes, often. Sometimes they are children of our friends, white and colored. The crowd may be all Negro, or all white, or mixed. Pauli never seems to plan his parties, they just happen and grow. We enjoy them as much as he does. Once he asked me if he could bring a boy home for dinner. He didn't tell me who he was, nor what he was. I said of course, but then I remembered that some friends of ours were coming for the week end. I asked Pauli if his friend was white or colored. Pauli was startled, and said, rebuking me, 'Fine question, I must say!' I said, 'Well, it doesn't matter at all to me, but you know how B. is—he's such a tease.' Pauli then told me the boy was a classmate and was a refugee German Jew. The boy turned out to be charming and very sensitive and we did have to protect him a little from the teasing."

Eslanda said all this in the firm decisive way in which American mothers speak of their children. There was boundless kindness in her warm voice, and her eyes were understanding and humorous. But there was no nonsense about her and no indecision as to what was good for Pauli. Such a mother must be the source of security for the child. In the shifting values of American life, she alone is unchanging. It is not so much love, perhaps, that the American child feels in the mother as it is stability. I have observed that in the American community it is the women who set the standards of behavior. Such tradition as there is must be carried on by them and upheld in turn for each generation. Where they continue narrow and limited in experience and vision, the community ideals are narrow and limited. In America men seem unable to rise above their women. I said to Eslanda, "You have lived in many other countries. Do you think that the influence of American women differs from that of women elsewhere?"

"Yes, I do," she said. "I think the American woman has more authority. Men are more afraid of her."

"You think American men are really afraid of women?" I asked, unbelieving.

"Most of them are," she replied. "Women have power in their homes, women get more sympathy, men even side with women. In the courts, for example, women have definite rights, and very often I don't think they deserve them. In divorce cases, as I said, Americans are quick to say when a man leaves a woman, 'He's taken the best years of her life, and now he wants someone younger.' The woman feels abused and neglected, but she rarely feels guilty, or at fault. Yet it is a common fact that many women do not keep up with their husbands. They let themselves go to seed, do not take a lively interest in his work, and so on. Very often the woman is to blame for the increasing failures in marriage, but most men are afraid to say so."

Why should there be so much fear among us? I had myself felt very often the pressures of fear in us. We are too sensitive to public opinion, afraid of public criticism, terrified of pointed fingers. We have not yet built a social background.

"Is it a question of time?" I asked.

"It's a question of not knowing what sort of persons we want to be," Eslanda replied.

This woke an echo in my mind. "The trouble with American women," one of them had said, "is that we don't know what we are supposed to be!" I had replied, "Why bother about what we are supposed to be? Why not decide what we want to be? In Hitler's Germany women waited to be told what they were supposed to be. But this is America!"

Eslanda went on talking as though she were answering my thoughts. "I remember when I was a girl growing up in Harlem, I had to make up my mind what I wanted to be. Did I want to dress well, or did I want to develop my personality rather than my appearance? Of course I



## AMERICAN ARGUMENT

wanted both, but I had to choose which was to be more important. We had to pass a poolroom to get out of our block. Lots of boys stood about in front of the poolroom and made rude audible remarks about the girls passing by. Most of the girls were concerned about how their faces, hair, and clothes looked as they passed the boys, but I was more concerned about my behavior; I never wanted them to be able to say, after we had passed, 'That girl can be kissed, or necked, or more—'

"We Americans seem to be deeply concerned about appearances, about how things look, about surface things, about what other people think about us, not about how we feel about ourselves." She paused. Then she said, "I want my house to be functional, so that we can all be comfortable and happy in it. I don't care at all about the style or the period, or how it looks to other people. That's how I feel about everything."

"Where did you get such ideas?" I inquired.

She smiled. "Perhaps because I have had special problems! Big Paul is six feet three and weighs well over two hundred, so in our home the furniture has to be big and strong. Our beds are seven feet long. Our ceilings have to be high, so he doesn't feel he'll bump his head when he stands up. With his work hours—he works at night—and with Pauli growing up and going to school, they had to be so placed in the house as not to disturb each other. The color of our skins requires definite and different color selections for becoming backgrounds. With all these major special problems, there has been no time or inclination for conforming to the generally accepted styles. But isn't independence American?"

It is not only American, it is human. The primary feeling in the average person is the wish to be free. When the wish is combined with the will, we have the determination to be free, and such determination, working against oppressive forces throughout centuries, in every country, is what makes history. This is the basic conflict of life, the

individual as well as the collective life. Love of independence is not an American possession. It works as fiercely in the Chinese, in the Frenchman, in the Korean, and the Indonesian, as it does in the American. Perhaps it works even more fiercely, for we Americans are careless of our freedom. We have always possessed it. . . .

No, not all of us have always possessed freedom. I keep forgetting. I asked Eslanda, "When did you first begin to think of America as America—something of which you were a part?"

The firmest conviction that Eslanda has, and she is a creature of firmness, is that she is American above all else. However much of our country is denied her, she knows it is all hers at least as much as it is mine. As for me, there is nothing in America to which I do not feel I have a right, if I want it and will work for it. Her voice was quiet and her eyes were proud as she answered me.

"I think it goes back to my grandfather, and my pride in him. All during my childhood I heard and read about Francis Lewis Cardozo and his great contribution to the making of Reconstruction history during the confusion of post-Civil War days. He was one of the first Negro politicians. We are all very proud of his great dignity and integrity. These qualities are none too common in American politicians. As his granddaughter, I have always felt very American indeed. Also, I was born in the capital of the nation, and that made me feel part of my country, too.

"As I grew up, I began to understand the barriers that face the Negro people here in America. Strangely enough, these barriers never made me feel that I was not American. They made me feel that the people who erected these barriers were very un-American, as indeed they are. . . .

"I began to feel a little differently when we went abroad to live. In London, where we lived for twelve years, the American Ambassador gives a special party every Fourth of July to which all Americans in England are invited—all except colored Americans. We were never invited to

## AMERICAN ARGUMENT

these parties. We were invited to many of the most interesting and historic homes in England, and the English people felt that Paul was a distinguished American artist and person, yet our own Embassy never included us officially or socially. Our many English friends commented upon this, you may be sure."

"No Americans invited you?" I asked.

"Oh yes, and it was the cordiality and warmth of our personal friends that kept us from being bitter. Alexander Woollcott, Carl Van Vechten and his wife, the Harry Murrays, for instance—and many others were frequently in London, and always sought us out."

"What did your English friends say about your treatment by our Embassy?" I asked.

"They said it was bad taste, socially and politically, as indeed it was."

"Did they have any understanding of why?"

"Yes, they understood perfectly. I'm afraid they felt perhaps a little self-righteous. They were doing even worse to their own colonial peoples in their colonies, mind you, but they were nice in England. When very rich or very royal Indians or Africans came to London, they were not discriminated against. But I remember how a nabob, from Afghanistan I think he was, complete with entourage, came to an exclusive hotel in London and reserved a whole floor. After they left, the hotel fumigated the whole floor."

"Did they announce that they did that?"

"No, but it was known."

All things under heaven are known to the people in any country. When I listened to the speechmaking at the Democratic Convention, which was no worse than the speechmaking at the Republican Convention, I heard a Southern delegate refer to lynching as "what north of the Mason and Dixon line is called murder." But he should know that lynching is called murder all over the world except in a few places in the South. The peoples of China

and India and the South Seas, the peoples of Europe and England, especially, alas, the people of Russia and all their friends, hear about every lynching that takes place in those few Southern spots of ours, and they all call it murder. Nearly the whole world lies above the Mason and Dixon line when it comes to lynching.

Eslanda was talking while I mused.

"In Moscow, one Christmas when we were there, the different embassies had parties for their nationals. All the Americans we knew in Moscow were invited to the American Embassy party except us. This social insult embarrassed and offended us particularly, because it was entirely unnecessary in a country like the U.S.S.R. It amused us, though, when several other embassies did invite us.

"Yet this American prejudice is very unpredictable. When you least expect it it slaps you down, and when you do expect it, you may be warmed through to find that it isn't being practiced at some particular point. For instance, we went to Czechoslovakia for some concerts. We were astonished and gratified to find, on arriving in Prague, a formal, official, and deeply cordial note of welcome from the American Minister to Czechoslovakia—a Mr. Einstein, by the way! Mr. Einstein and his staff attended our concert, entertained us at supper at the Legation, and invited the interesting and distinguished people of Prague to meet us, his fellow countrymen. His treatment of us was charming and considerate, with no hint whatever of patronage. He could not have been kinder to the President. I remember being driven from Smetana Hall, where the concert was held, to the Legation in the official car with its tiny American flag flying from the hood. Larry, Paul, and I agreed then that this was one time we could feel proud of our flag. Mr. Einstein never knew what he did for us. We had a rather low opinion of Americans abroad just then."

What Eslanda was saying reminded me of something. After the First World War, German trade made enormous

progress in China. Great American and British firms were there, too, with unlimited money and buttressed with extraterritorial rights. The Germans were poor and their extraterritorial rights had been lost during the war. They needed trade desperately for the rebuilding of their country and for their personal support as merchants in the East. Poor and unprotected as they were, time and again contracts went to them instead of to the rich and buttressed Americans and English.

I asked a Chinese merchant friend why this was. He replied with the slow Chinese smile that means everything. "Americans are very impatient. They find our feasts long. They want to settle business quickly. But that is not our way. As for the English, they find our food strange, and their ladies do not like to call upon our ladies. The Germans are patient and polite at our feasts, and their ladies come to call upon ours."

The humanities count, even in business, and the greatest of all arts is the art of human intercourse. This art is not only subtle, it is more powerful than any other force. When we Americans know that this is true, when we learn to practice this supreme art, we can be sure of our existence as a nation. No nation is sure of existence until it has learned the art of human intercourse. China and India have existed throughout all known history, and exist today as the most secure nations on earth, certain of continuity. But Rome is dead.

I asked Eslanda, "When you lived in England those years, did you get a new point of view on Americans?"

"Yes, I did," she replied with energy. "I finally became embarrassed by Americans, the way one is said to feel about poor relations. Americans had to have ice, had to have butter, had to have fast service, had to have everything 'modern.' If they didn't get these things, they were quite vocal with their criticism. If everything wasn't as it was in America, it was inferior.

"They still do this. Negro soldiers returning now from

overseas comment upon this behavior of white American soldiers abroad. It seems they often made fun of farmers using carts, horses, hoes, and so on, and bragged about American farm machinery and tractors. But our Negro soldiers, many of whom were sharecroppers from the South who worked under some of the same handicaps which the European peasants suffered, took a sympathetic interest in the farmers they met, and made friends with everybody. When the Red Cross ran parties for the troops, the white boys brought along prostitutes and whatever girls they could pick up, but the Negro boys brought not only girls, but their whole families, with whom they had made friends."

The art of human intercourse cannot be learned as one learns to run a machine. Machines are simple and can be run by stupid people. To understand a human being and to know how to communicate with him, without yielding up one's own selfhood, takes a certain wisdom which, while it is instinctive in a few rare persons, is for most of us the fruit of experience, either individual or racial. In China, for example, each generation teaches the next one the art of human intercourse. Few Americans understand either the art or the teaching. I missed the atmosphere when I first came here, and then I found it, after all, among Negroes. It is a wonderful atmosphere in which to live, a compound of courtesy, instinct, gaiety, and good talk. I tried to tell Eslanda how delightful it was to find it.

She knew at once what I meant.

"We have a joke among Negroes—you can ask, 'How high is *up*?' and make conversation from that. Maybe the difference is that white Americans spend a lot of time and energy in asserting and insisting upon their superiority as white Americans. We Negroes can't do this, so we put a lot of time and energy into the serious business of trying to live and build up a life. We've had to find out how to

enjoy life where life wasn't very enjoyable, and that develops philosophy."

Here came one of our ruminative pauses. Our two minds went their separate ways. Mine was a familiar and gloomy path. I considered the history of the white man in the world and his probable destiny.

Out of her own thoughts Eslanda spoke. "White Americans, with their so-called superiority, close a lot of doors against themselves, consciously or unconsciously."

"What doors?" I asked. I had heard them slam too often in a dozen countries.

"White Americans won't let themselves fraternize with many people, especially with Negroes. But this kind of thing grows, and now one finds that the average white American doesn't want to fraternize with anyone whom he considers beneath him in the social, professional, or economic scale. The average well-to-do or middle-class American would not like to be seen chatting in a friendly way with the garbage man, for instance, do you think? On terms of social equality?"

"Wouldn't he?" I asked. "I don't know."

She shook her head. "Typical Americans have very definite ideas on how to treat servants. They're quite strong minded about attitudes toward people who work for them. They must be kept under, treated as inferior. The question whether he'll become a professional worker, a white-collar worker, or a laborer is important to a man in this country. Even though he can make much more money doing laboring work, he will probably choose white-collar work, because Americans have arbitrarily made up their minds that clerical work has dignity while laboring work has none. The Negro has to be much more realistic under the pressure of life here, since in general he is denied all social standing anyway. Of course, we do have some of these weaknesses in Negro society, too, but we can't afford so many of them.

"White Americans have tried very hard to close off

Negroes from the general currents of national life, and a strange and interesting state of affairs has resulted from this treatment. We Negroes know pretty well almost all there is to know about white Americans—they insist upon having Negro servants, and you know how well servants come to know the people they work for, even to their most personal foibles and weaknesses. On the other hand, white people know very little about Negroes, only what they can find out the hard way, and what we Negroes choose to tell them.”

Here again I was reminded of something.

Once I lived in a small city in the north of China. A bad-tempered American lived there, too, with his family. The family had great difficulty in keeping servants, because of this temper which ruled the house. Bad temper is a sign of ill breeding in China, and the atmosphere of ill breeding is unpleasant in any country, at any level. It was particularly difficult for the family to keep a woman servant, or amah, for by tradition the woman servant sleeps in the house, in the attic room. One woman, at last, stayed on. She was an elderly, brisk, cheerful soul, and she withstood all the peevishness and bad humor of the master of the house.

The years went on. One day a Chinese neighbor came to visit me, and the talk flowed about the world. My friend spoke of the difference between the temperaments of East and West, as exemplified in our small neighborhood. Sensitive to the frailty of my local countryman, I said that his temper must be getting better as he grew older, since the amah had now been with the family for five years.

My friend looked amused. Then she said: “Why should I not tell you? You know that the American family drinks the water from the cistern?”

I did know this. Our local water was bitter with lime, and the Americans found it hard to drink. They preferred to have cisterns made to catch the rain water that fell



## AMERICAN ARGUMENT

from the corrugated iron roofs of the mission houses. The servants drank the bitter well water.

"What has the cistern to do with the temper?" I asked.

"Everything," my friend retorted. "The amah's room is in the attic, as you know. Well, I tell you, she finds his temper difficult but she has found a way to bear it."

"What is it?" I asked. Horrible suspicion began to creep into my mind.

My friend leaned forward to whisper her next words. "She empties her night pot on the roof every morning!"

Suspicion was confirmed. The contents flowed into the cistern. Every soul in the city knew the manner in which the suffering amah had managed to assuage her resentment—everybody except the American family. I give this factual incident merely to re-enforce what Eslanda had said. It is true that rulers are always at the mercy of those whom they rule. The only safety for rulers is to maintain good relationships.

I looked at Eslanda. There she sat, handsome, calm, and self-assured. Obviously no one ruled her. How had she grown up like this, a Negro in a white America?

"I want to go back," I said. "Let's think of you as that child of twelve, coping with the housekeeping in a railroad flat in Harlem, while your mother earned the living for you and your brothers. Did you have ambitions? Did you think of yourself as a person apart from your daily life?"

I wanted to find out how she became what she was. Is there not credit somewhere for America that Eslanda could grow up here into this free successful independent woman?

"I've always coped with the moment, and at that time the need was to get the highest grades I could in school," she replied.

I pressed questions and she answered quickly.

"Did you find something of the same spirit among your neighbors? Were you unusual in your ambition?"

"I have often found something of the same spirit in the foreign born."

"Did you ever have any feeling that it might not be useful to get these high grades because opportunity might be limited?"

"No, quite the contrary! I thought I'd never get the opportunity if I didn't get the high grades."

"So you really grew up with no sense of suppression?"

"I don't think I had any sense of suppression while I was growing up."

"Would you say that our country offers opportunity to everybody?"

"I think that everyone could have opportunity if the small but very active and powerful group of un-Americans didn't make a business of *preventing* it."

"When you say that, do you mean people economically concerned? Let's name them."

She named them. "First there are the poll-tax congressmen. Take Bilbo, he made a business of it. A friend of mine, a Negro, told me he sat at a table just a few feet from Bilbo in the hotel dining room during the Democratic Convention in Chicago, and Bilbo was quite pleasant. But in the South Bilbo got elected for being a Negro-hater and anti-Negro. He had to have an appealing electioneering slogan.

"Then there are the real-estate men. They are definitely anti-Negro, and deliberately insist upon segregation, by their 'gentlemen's agreement,' written and unwritten, to keep Negroes and Jews out of desirable residential districts all over the country. They have a powerful real-estate lobby in Washington, which is very difficult to fight. They oppose and prevent a lot of legislation that would be favorable to us. They have to have some reason to keep real-estate prices high—they make it exclusive.

"Then there are the organized manufacturers, who oppose favorable legislation, including the F.E.P.C., which would help Negroes, and other members of minorities, to

## AMERICAN ARGUMENT

get jobs in industry, jobs suitable to their training and skill. The N.A.M. also has a powerful and very active lobby in Washington which works against us. They have to find some means to keep labor separated into various groups, to keep wages down.

"Also, there are the people—and these include millions who feel socially insecure themselves. They have to find some reason to make them feel securely secure."

"White, or colored?"

"Mostly white. American society starts on the premise that Negroes are inferior, so they are socially insecure, anyway, and can't do much about it. But the insecure whites sometimes feel better when they can look down on someone else. This gives them a false, and I think dangerous, feeling of superiority. Then there are the white people who are 'on the make' socially."

"Wouldn't they be the same as those socially insecure?"

"No, this is another business. I mean the climbers, the people who know perfectly well that there is no difference between themselves and Negroes and Jews, and who may not have any feeling at all against them, but who know it is fashionable to display prejudice, and do this to make an impression."

I have discovered that my country is divided not only into black and white but, among other divisions, into men and women. Our men and women are not integrated into a social whole. The divisions between us are as profound as the depths between white and black. I always hope that women—but there, I am learning better now.

I asked, with some pleading, however, "Are not women leaders for equality in our America?"

Eslanda in spite of natural impetuosity has learned never to answer everything at once. "In *your* America," she said with emphasis, "I think it would be easier for an outsider to work into a woman's club than a man's," she replied. "Women are more human than men—and more

adventurous, because they have not much to lose economically."

I asked, "Is a white woman or a white man more ready to see one of their kind marry a Negro?"

"I think white women are against white men marrying Negro women, because that means one less for themselves. Negro women are against Negro men marrying white women, for the same cause," Eslanda said reasonably.

One of the major inconsistencies in Americans is our apparent determination to keep black and white separate in all the superficial aspects of our life, while allowing the real mixture to go on. Sixty per cent of the Negroes in the United States are mixed white and black. Negroes alone could not achieve this surprising estate.

"Is there nothing in a white man's mind against sleeping with a colored woman?" I asked Eslanda.

"Apparently nothing," she replied indifferently.

"Eslanda," I demanded, "as woman to woman, what's all the fuss about, here in the United States?"

She laughed. "It's the old story of 'You do what I say, not what I do.' This whole matter of prejudice has nothing to do with any facts or with any sense. It is just like calling names."

I paused for a few more facts about the Question.

"If a poor white man's daughter married a rich Negro's son, would it make any difference?"

"It would be easier for a rich white girl to marry a Negro, because she has the social strength and security to carry it off."

"If a white man is a nobody, would his daughter be lifted up by marrying a rich Negro?"

"I don't think so. It might even be that the poor white man, being insecure himself, would be embarrassed and angry because his daughter's situation—economic situation, anyway—was improved by marriage to a Negro."

I gave it all up. The facts had to me no rational end. People were only calling each other names.

## AMERICAN ARGUMENT

"Why do Americans still want to call names?" I asked.

"Perhaps for the same reason that small boys call names, and write dirty words on the walls—because they have no proper discipline, have not been properly taught, or because they are just plain vicious. Calling names seems to be an old American custom. We have some pretty nasty indoor sports which are disgusting—such as drinking too much, using really bad language, calling names, and so on."

"Does that mean that our adult thoughts are still occupied with these childish things?"

To this she said, "Americans seem to want to prove themselves big. Like the small boy who writes four-letter words on the sidewalk, men often insist upon using these same words loudly in public. It really is disgusting."

Eslanda had brought to my mind still another of the strange and interesting aspects of our country. To use what is called bad language is a peculiarly American trait. Bad language in any country is interesting because it reveals the psychological level of the individual using it. I heard plenty of bad language in China, but there it was used by persons who did not care to what class they belonged. Anyone with education would be ashamed to use it, not for moral reasons, but because it would betray them as belonging actually to a class which they considered beneath them. Anyone who could read and write would be ashamed to use bad language, for in China learning, however elementary, indicated the social class to which an individual belongs.

Yet, as I reflected, I remembered that even among uneducated persons, bad language was used for a purpose. No curses can surpass Chinese curses in naturalism and vigor and foulness. They reach back to bedevil ancestors and they stretch forward to blacken the remotest descendant. But nobody, at least in my experience, which is fairly wide because of the roving nature of my childhood and

youth, ever said dirty words just for pleasure. Yet one need only to be near American young men, when they do not know you are near, or for that matter one need only read the recent spate of books about war to realize that American men, at least, get an erotic pleasure out of dirty words. Of course every little boy anywhere gets this pleasure, but here it stays long beyond boyhood.

Perhaps some men take pleasure first in baby dirt and second in defying now the strong-minded and strong-armed women who washed out their mouths with soap when they were little boys. I feel sorry for American mothers. Dirty words have great significance to their sons, and while it is the fault of women that this is so, still the wrong methods have gone on now for so long that these words have become a pleasurable habit with their sons, and it is hard to break the habit.

The Chinese mother has never curbed dirty language in her forward young son. She is completely indifferent to his childish desire to talk about feces, the sex act, and so on. She realizes that this interest relates somehow to babyhood, and she takes it for granted that it will pass, as passed the childish desire to suckle, to dirty himself, to cry when he fell down. Moreover, in China there is nothing hidden about these natural acts. When children have to relieve themselves they do so in any convenient spot, and, except in the best families, even a man will simply go around the corner or step to the door. There is nothing secret or interesting about natural functions. In a village when a woman delivers a child everybody knows it and children may even stand about to observe unreprieved. All this naturalism is a catharsis of some sort and the pleasure in talk about it does not linger on into adult life.

I do not know how to apply naturalism now to our life. I am not in the least ashamed of dirty words, but I am ashamed of the fact that our men find pleasure in them. During the war when our young men habitually spoke

## AMERICAN ARGUMENT

foul language, it was said that they did so as a release. But why did they need release in this fashion? Obviously because they had not as children had their fill of dirt. They wanted more dirt. They craved it. Their nursing bottles had been taken away from them too young.

# IV

## *Male and Female*

I ASKED ESLANDA, "IF YOUR SON SHOULD WANT to marry before he can support himself and his wife, will you allow it?"

Eslanda gave one of her big laughs. "It's flattering to imply that I could 'allow' or 'not allow' it! I think and hope that he would consult us. I want him to marry when he wants to marry and I would most certainly help him economically if he needed it and if I could do so."

She looked thoughtful for a moment and then went on. "Still, struggle is part of our pattern. We appreciate what we get only if we have to struggle for it. Our son will have to earn what he gets. If we are unable to give him all he needs or wants, at least he will have had a marvelous childhood. He has always been the center of the house, so he doesn't have to assert himself. He has always had an important voice in the family and in the home, so I hope he doesn't have any inhibitions or repressions."

I am always impressed with the tone of doubt which the best of American parents use when speaking of their offspring. I am accustomed to the older Chinese civilization where the relationships between parents and children are beyond doubt. Society is behind these relationships and only the most daring child may flout them. Some do, nowadays. It is, of course, convenient for both child and parent to know the relationships expected of them. Within confines there can be personal freedom and interchange.



But duties are clear. One reason, perhaps, that American children are restless and often insecure is because their duties are not clear. Duties are those things that have to be done for comfort and convenience in living, and life is at once more clear and more free when one can finish those things that should be done. A child of mine once said to me, "I don't like this progressive school because I never know when I am finished." She meant, "I want to know when I have performed my duties, for then I can proceed to pleasure."

So it is with the relationships. In human relationships certain things must be done, must be said, in order that fundamentals may be established properly. Parents must care for a child physically and see that he is mentally and emotionally satisfied. These are their duties. Children must recognize their need to be taught and must co-operate with their parents in the learning process. With mutual respect, duties are simple and easy.

I asked Eslanda, "Do you think American parents give their children too much affection or not enough?"

This question I put because Chinese children get so much more demonstrative affection than American children do. In a Chinese family the baby is held and fondled and adored by all the generations in the house. Here our fear of germs, or of Freudian notions, often prevents early emotional satisfaction.

Eslanda said, "I think we give them affection, but that isn't enough. I don't think Americans in general do enough about their personal relationships. Many parents have no idea what makes their children tick. Pauli said to me once when he was very young, 'I think parents are dumb.' I was surprised, and asked why. He said, 'Well, parents don't know anything about children.' I asked, 'Can't they learn?' He answered, 'They could, but they don't bother. We could tell them a lot of things.' I said, 'I'd like very much to learn about you.' He smiled at me

with new interest and affection and said, "All right, I'll teach you. I'll bring you up and you bring me up.'"

Eslanda was reaching for something very deep in American nature. This neglect of the fundamentals in human relationships is characteristic of us. We do not want to bother about feelings. We are not good at human relations because we are a selfish people, individually and therefore collectively. We hurry to get our own individual satisfactions out of life. We do not realize that our own satisfactions are incomplete unless they include the satisfactions of other people. A satisfactory friendship is impossible unless care is taken for mutuality. A marriage cannot be satisfactory unless there is true mutuality. A parent can find no joy in parenthood unless the child enjoys being the child of this parent, and the child misses the satisfaction of being son or daughter unless he learns how to satisfy the parent, as a parent.

In a dim fashion we have begun to realize that we are not good at human relationships, and out of this has developed that strange and monstrous growth, public relations as a business. We now pay people to tell us how to behave toward other people in such a way that they will like us well enough to deal with us.

We are still not getting real satisfaction out of life. For we cannot get the fullness of pleasure out of any relationship, even a business one, so long as the relationship only goes far enough to consider our own benefit. The other person must also get full benefit. Public relations principles are based on how far you must go, how much you must give up, before you begin to get some returns in good will, affection, friendship, or whatever is wanted. But you do not get all you want unless you give all that is wanted. This essential of human relationships is so simple that there is no use in paying anybody to teach you how to achieve it. To win all you must yield all. The old Eastern religions and philosophies teach this in one form or another. "He that hath friends must show himself

friendly." "He that would save himself must first lose himself," are familiar words. The teaching is sound psychology. Anything less is spurious and will be detected sooner or later. When it is detected the resulting anger will cancel all the efforts of public relations. We Americans will have to replace public relations with human relations. The two are not the same thing.

"I feel that we are no good at human relations," Eslanda was saying. "We don't have basic respect for and consideration of the human being. One reason Americans are not happy as individuals is that we don't care about other people. That's why we have the wrong ideals; that's why the wrong things are important to us. In millions of homes they won't let you raise the shade because the sun will fade the carpet. So the family doesn't enjoy the carpet, it only enjoys the impression it makes on the company. That is sterile enjoyment."

"Are people impressed?" I asked.

"Yes, I think they are," she replied. "At least, parlor conversation goes on."

"Where does the strange American desire for parlor conversation and constant amusement come from?"

"I think it comes from lack of personal adjustment. In struggling to keep up with artificial standards, to impress other people, one does not consider one's own personal standards. One does not impress oneself; therefore there is no personal integration, and this lack of integration gives rise to restlessness. If you go to a party because you like the people personally, you relax and enjoy yourself, and then go home satisfied. But if you go to a party to be seen, to make contacts, to impress people, or because you are afraid you'll miss something—why, then you have to keep on going. In some circles here, you keep on and go to several other parties the same evening. They don't seem to do that sort of thing anywhere else."

"Where do you get your own differing attitudes?" I asked.

"I made them myself for myself," she replied with customary independence.

Acclimated as I am to an old people, I am not sure that Eslanda is right in being so independent. There is a certain fixity about life. I do not believe, as the Chinese did, that fate is inexorable. To believe this is to remove the possibility of faith in oneself and in the progress of mankind. But there are certain inalterables, nevertheless, fixed not by fate but by what has gone before. Americans have their fatalisms, too. In these days how many Americans, to excuse their apathy, say, for example, that war is inevitable, that because there have always been wars, there will always be wars, there must always be wars. This is a fatalism as absurd as the most foolish superstition of the oldest and least literate of persons in China. There is a certain fatalism about the coming of war, but it is only the inevitability of events following upon events. At any point events can be prevented. No war is inevitable unless events have been allowed to happen, one after another, which lead to war. To allow these events is of course to allow war. I may change my metaphor. War is like any other disease of the human race. Given the atmosphere and the symptoms, if nothing is given as an antidote, the disease strikes. But it is foolish fatalism to say that the disease is inevitable because it strikes as a result of nothing done to prevent it. The extent of my fatalism is that certain inevitable results follow certain preventable causes.

I asked Eslanda, "How much does attitude have to do with the chemistry of the body? We are made up of chemical molecules. This combination creates a person who is independent and has the ability to think, or produces a lazy careless person who drifts."

"Environment, too," she said promptly.

I considered her environment.

"Do you think that Negro women are stronger and more vital, generally speaking, than white women?" I asked.

## AMERICAN ARGUMENT

There was no doubt in her answer. "I certainly do—Negro women and women with a foreign background. They can't just say they are superior, as the average American white woman does, and then sit back and go to seed. We have to work for even a lowly place in American society."

Work was Eslanda's environment. I knew that. With almost every handicap possible in our country to a normal person, she has worked herself to the top. She is not one of the many women who sit by and watch their husbands rise to fame and position. She has had a hand in making the family famous. She has applied industry and ambition as well as love to her most intimate relationships. How had she done this?

"Were you interested in the way Paul thought, his attitudes, his reading, everything about him, before you were married?" I asked.

"I was interested in all that," she replied. "I think, on the whole, that American women look to men to do things for them, to support them. I could and did support myself, so I knew that I would like to live with Paul for the rest of my life. He had some personal habits I didn't like, but I was conceited enough to think, like most women, that I could change them. He's very clean, but untidy; he's very kind and generous, but thoughtless and neglectful; he could become interested in something and forget for long periods that I was there."

"Did he change?"

"No, that's the funny part—I changed! If two very different people are to live together, they must necessarily adapt themselves to each other. I tried for years to change Paul, and finally gave up because I wasn't getting anywhere. Eventually I changed a lot and learned and grew in the changing. Paul taught me tolerance and patience, which I'd never had, and which I've found very useful."

There is no use in pretending that Eslanda is an average American woman. She is not. She is always surprising me

with her attitudes. This one, for example, of not expecting her husband to support her! Surely it is very unusual in our American life. American women are divided into two groups, those who want to work outside the home and those who don't. The first group is very small—so small that it scarcely affects our national life. The second group is very large. It comprehends those who work only until they can marry and those, already married, who are compelled to work outside the home because their men do not make enough money to support the family. These women belong with the large group because their outside work is desultory in character and they stop it at once when they marry or when the men are able to increase the family income.

The real difference is not between work at home and work outside. It is between the woman who can be contained in four walls with only occasional explosions and the one who cannot, because if she is, she blows the house up. Most American women belong to the first group because they are of a docile and somewhat lazy disposition. They complain a good deal of many things but they don't do anything about them. In the main group, at least, they are basically content to be sheltered. They are not always pleasant about it, but given the choice, and all American women have the choice, they prefer to be the stalled cow.

I began a catechism of American marriage.

"I have noticed that an American woman transfers to her husband the attitude she had toward her father. Her father always took care of her and supported her, and she expects the husband to do the same that her father did for her."

"That's what our American customs have taught her to expect as her right," Eslanda said.

"Suppose you were telling a young girl what her rights are in marriage, what would you say?" I asked.

"A home and support," she said promptly.

"How much liberty?"

## AMERICAN ARGUMENT

"Well, that's vague and variable. What she can manage, what she can wangle depend on what her man is like. Usually she has plenty of liberty."

"What does an American man expect of his wife?"

"He expects that she will keep the house, have children, and be company for him when he is at home."

"Besides supporting her, does a woman expect him to be faithful to her in a sexual sense?"

"No. She says she expects it, and hopes he will be, but she knows that he probably won't."

"Does a man expect a wife to be faithful?"

"Yes. He's a fool to expect it, but he does. And if he finds out she isn't, he often divorces her."

This was not very different from a Chinese catechism of marriage, except in details. The Chinese man, until the present generation, did not expect his wife to be his companion. He found companionship elsewhere, with men friends and with singing girls. The Chinese wife did not expect her husband to be faithful to her sexually, and did not even hope it. She was complacent and surprised if he was. When he was not, she brought the affair under her own control by allowing him to have concubines whom he brought into the house and whom she ruled as she might rule upper maids. The average Chinese man did not make enough money to support more than one wife, however, and so poverty aided the woman. But as soon as he was rich, unless he loved his wife, a concubine was to be expected. The Chinese have their hypocrisies but the nature of man is not one of them. They realize the sexual difference between man and woman. It is as marked as the sexual difference between the male and female of any species. Only the control of an almost unique quality of love in the man for the woman can keep him from behaving as does the male of any other species.

It may be asked why a few men are capable of this quality of love while others are not. The answer is that

these few are mentally and spiritually developed beyond the average male animal. Their instincts may be as strong as those of the lower creatures, but they find that their pleasure even in exercising their instincts is enhanced by other pleasures. For such men love is more than physical, and because it is, even the physical is stronger and more profound than in the usual male animal.

Such men are to be found in any people. They are born and not made, and when they marry women who are their own kind the two are blessed. But they are not the average. In China, among a people aged in common sense, laws and customs are for the average, and of course there is compromise.

"Must all marriages come to a compromise?" I asked Eslanda, whose essence is common sense.

"I think so," she replied. "I think all life must come to a compromise. But most people aren't willing to make compromises. I believe that in marriage the partners have to decide what they want, find out how much of what they want they have a fair chance of getting, and then settle for that. Most people want it all roses. There just aren't that many roses. I'd rather pick a rose now and then as I go along."

"When do you think compromise begins?"

"When you can be realistic, when you can examine yourself and your circumstances objectively, and face the facts of life. Did you see a play called *Christopher Blake*? Moss Hart wrote it, and I found it extraordinarily interesting. It was a tragic and moving study of the young son of parents who were being divorced. It was clear in the play that the parents had drifted apart because they had not taken an active interest in each other. Both parents loved the boy, who was a most attractive and satisfying child. What interested me most in the play was the typically American woman's attitude toward marriage. Here the woman was, nearly forty, still seeing herself in terms of the girl she had been when she first married, and resent-



ing the fact that her life was not so romantic now as it had been then. For heaven's sake! She doesn't see that now she and her husband have something different, something more substantial to build on—a background of experience together, building a home together, and bringing up a wonderful boy! But no, the wife, even though she loves her son, decides she must divorce her husband and seek a romance which she very foolishly imagines she rates at this late date! She must have romance, glamour. At the end of the play the boy, young and very hurt and disorganized, chooses to go to the father because he feels the father needs him.

"I think Moss Hart could have done a great service to American women if he had said to the wife in the play, 'Look, honey, be yourself, be your age. What is so glamorous and romantic about you, nearly forty, that you can expect the glamour and romance you hoped for and got at twenty? But look at what you have instead, your rather nice husband, your home, security, and most of all, your wonderful son. Why not settle for that and be grateful, and make the most of it?' But no, she breaks it up, and goes looking for glamour and romance again. After all, the gals in Hollywood are always twenty-five and the advertisements always show everybody forever young, so what can you expect? She seems obscene to me." A look of strong disgust was on Eslanda's mobile features.

She went on, "I remember once when I went to a world-famous hairdresser in Paris to get a new hairdo. He wanted to give me the 'windswept' that everybody was wearing. I said, 'Oh no, that is not for me.' He was surprised. I said, 'I came to you because I was told you were an artist who studied face, figure, and personality, and then worked out a hair style suitable to the person. With my broad shoulders, lack of height, high cheekbones, and strong jawline, a windswept will be much too hard.' He was interested, and gave me a really lovely, flattering, dignified style which I have used, with a few changes, ever

since. He told me afterward that most American women come to him for the latest hairdo, no matter what it is, and whether it suited them or not. Aged twenty, forty, sixty, all wanted the same.

"The smart dressmakers on the Rue de la Paix said the same thing. Most American women, short, tall, fat, thin, young, old, want the latest models, whether they suit them or not. I used to be embarrassed for some of my 'smart' countrywomen of fifty in their beautiful but extremely undignified tight little dresses, and great big women with piano legs in the 'fashionable' short skirts, looking somehow indecent.

"If the average American woman spent half the time and money on developing her mind and her personality that she spends on make-up and clothes, she could be very interesting and really attractive. As it is now, she looks good, and expects continued homage because of these externals. Glamour, everywhere—in the movies, on the radio, in the advertisements, youth and glamour! Women don't seem to realize that both are fleeting.

"Now I don't want you to think that I don't appreciate glamour. It has its place, of course. But it definitely hasn't first place. If you tell me that I must appear at a first night, or at an important party a week from Sunday, and look my best, I can and will do it. It is quite an undertaking, but I'll do it. It means some exercise and diet for figure control and carriage, it means the hairdresser, facial massage, manicurist, the dressmaker, and so on. It can be done occasionally, if it is important enough, but I don't want it as a career. What I do strive for is to be interesting and well informed and thoroughly comfortable and happy after I get to the party; that is a long-range program, and very worthwhile, I think."

So think I, also!

"When you were married," I asked Eslanda, "did you pay the bills?"

"Yes, I did," she replied.

"Did your husband mind?"

"Yes. So he arranged to play professional football in season, and that added a big lump to our exchequer."

"Do you think it spoiled the relationship when you both worked?"

"No, we had a lot of fun. I think it makes for a different and better relationship when both contribute the money. American men have a tendency to use their wives as trademarks of success. When he buys her a mink coat he may regard that as a kind of public bragging."

The wife in China does not expect to support herself financially. Her job, until the present generation, has been to produce children steadily until she is forty years old. The man has been expected to contribute to the support not merely of his own wife and children but to the general family expenses of which his own unit is only a part. All the men of the family have this obligation. When they are temporarily without work, they are supported by the others. A man so lazy as to be out of work habitually is still fed by the large family, but he cannot expect luxuries. Unless he is useful in some way he is merely kept from starvation, and his life is not a happy one.

I notice that the last war and the flood of veterans of marrying age have changed somewhat our own ruggedness toward marriage. Today many married men are not supporting their families. The government pays them enough to marry on, and parents add small private subsidies. This is a good change, provided the young couples realize that they owe a debt to society and their parents which must be paid eventually. In China a young couple is sheltered but the old ones expect shelter in their time, also. It is a mutual family insurance. I am interested to see that these recent American marriages seem to be working out well enough. There are plenty of divorces but the reasons given are not that the young veteran does not sup-

port his wife. The American marriage ought to be taken off the old economic basis.

I contemplated that young Eslanda. "You had the housework, too!"

Most foreign women are appalled at the amount of work the American housewife does. And the American woman feels that she has a full-time job in the house. Are they both right? This matter of housework is very important to American civilization. The average woman drags through the day. I am not speaking of the few rich who have all the gadgets, and even perhaps servants, but the average woman who has an electric iron and maybe a washing machine and a sewing machine.

"We had no electric iron when I was young," Eslanda was saying, "and no washing machine. I remember washing Paul's shirts when we were first married. I will always remember that, because his shirts were so very big! I'd wash Saturday afternoons and iron Sundays."

With all our gadgets, housework in America remains an unsettled problem. Somebody has to stay home to run the gadgets. And even with gadgets, which have to be cleaned and taken care of, there remain the inescapable jobs. I myself am fortunate enough to enjoy housework and cooking. There is no better way of resting after a hard morning at writing than to go into the kitchen and get a good meal or attack a closet that needs ordering. At such tasks brains can rest. But I shouldn't like to let my brains rest all the time. They would ferment.

As I say, I am lucky in my enjoyment of common tasks. But I know plenty of women who do not have such enjoyment and yet who must stay by home and children twenty-four hours a day because they cannot be left. Here is the chief reason for women's backwardness. Housework is the career of most American women, the doom of some, and the reason why our country, religion, and politics are run by men. It is the reason why our women, who have matchless opportunities for education and freedom, maintain

their petty rounds while atomic war threatens. Most American women are imprisoned by housework. It accounts in large measure for the lack of important contributions from women to science, the arts, and government. Whether they can get the laundry done and what they will buy for dinner claim their attention more than the United Nations, international relations, or even immediate death and destruction by war. Women cannot leave the boiling pot and the crying child. Men can and do, and the world is the worse for woman's absence.

Not that I put the least faith in women as they are! I have learned better. When a woman's companions are a boiling pot and a crying child, and when four walls make her world, she has no mind left, and she only echoes what the man says when he comes home and tells her what the world is like. She doesn't even read the newspapers—why should she? What is going on has nothing to do with her.

I used to think that women wanted a different world. I think they will when they have thought of some way to cope with their housework. As it is, they are docile, although often irritable and petty. They vote with the conservatives and the militarists. Ah, but they do! I went to Washington one fine spring day, in the highest optimism as an American citizen, to tell a senatorial committee why I think universal military training is absolute folly. The president of a great industry was there, too, to tell the committee why he believed in complete militarism now and maybe always. I was still complacent when I saw him, for I knew that there were other women there beside me. One represented what she called "two million home women," or in other words, women's clubs, and the other represented what might be called career women, the business and professional women. Among the three of us I thought we could outnumber the big fellow.

It was I who was outnumbered. The other two women spoke with the big fellow for complete militarization, mainly, from what I could gather, because they thought

boys of eighteen needed discipline and were a nuisance in the community and better off in the Army. This dazed me, for from what I had observed the boys were much more of a nuisance when they came back from the Army.

It did not matter very much. There were only four of the senatorial committee present during that afternoon. I was surprised at this, for there were thirteen on the committee. But I was told that an attendance of even four was large. When the big fellow and the three women finished there was one Senator left. The people who stayed through were not on the committee, but three rather grim-looking military men in uniform, who sat near the senators and stared at each one of us as we came up to testify. I was the only one to testify against what they wanted and I felt their stares. But I am a reckless woman, and long ago I ceased to be afraid of uniforms. It is not uniforms I now fear but women, ignorant and understanding nothing; women, who worship uniforms; women, who put Hitler into power in Germany; women, who blindly believe what they are told; women, millions strong, who never think and never know; women, who breed sons and send them into the Army without protest.

I refuse to believe that the strong stand which American women have taken for militarization has reasons more sinister than ignorance. But there are dark moments when I fight against the possibility that our women want to hug their shelters and privileges. Perhaps they want to keep the sort of society that has made shelters and privileges possible for them and they are willing to breed sons and send them out to fight to keep safe what they have. God forgive me for even imagining such creatures of evil! But why do women so easily fall victims to the propagandists and militarists? Are their minds benumbed by the dull daily round? What is the cause of their dreadful apathy?

"What do you think about housework now?" I asked Eslanda.

"Housework is a problem that has to be faced, and

solved. Most women don't regard it as a problem to be worked out, but as a boring, endless chore that has to be done, whether they like it or not."

"A woman has to do housework as a career, while a man can choose his profession according to his bent," I suggested.

She contradicted me. "American men seem to choose their professions for prestige, or for the prospect of making money. I can't believe that millions of men really enjoy being salesmen and traveling all their lives."

I persisted, "Anyway, men do the work they choose, for whatever reasons. But if the woman marries she has to do housework. She can't be a lawyer or a doctor—"

Eslanda contradicted me again. "She certainly can if she will. There are women who don't do housework as a profession. I have a friend, for example, who is a magistrate in the City Court of New York, and she has a home and baby, too. It can be done. The opportunity is there, but it has to be seized. The average woman gets bored with housework and takes it as a burden. It needn't be that way. It can be organized, so that she has free time in which to do other things if she is willing to put her mind to it. But if she doesn't—well, she is using housework as an alibi."

I would have liked to argue with Eslanda on this, but I had to agree with her. American women do find time for an amazing number of amusements. The lines in front of motion-picture theaters at eleven o'clock in the morning are women, more than men and children. Bridge parties are women more than men. A study by Ruth Shawcross reveals that women in business and professions are actually with their children a larger number of hours the year around than are the so-called home women, or women who have no other work than housework. I was shocked to hear a young matron of my acquaintance, speaking of another, say in a scornful voice, 'She's one of those who go in for culture and good works.'

Why not culture and good works? Culture means books

and the acquaintance of thinking persons, and our people are in sore need of good works. So is the world. But it takes great courage, it seems, in the average American community for a woman to have interest in these matters.

When I pondered why this is so, I realized that both culture and good works, as words, have been spoiled for us. Culture has been made ridiculous because of the pitiful attempts of women to learn about literature and current events through shallow programs planned by women equally ignorant. A half-hour lecture on the civilization of China, Greece in a nutshell, the poetry of Robert Browning in twenty minutes, these activities have supplied to our women what leg shows have supplied to our tired businessmen. Young women, nowadays, contemptuous of the gray-haired women's clubs, are scrupulous to separate themselves to avoid laughter. This might be a good sign if they did anything better, but they so often do nothing at all.

We have a way of spoiling good words by talking them to death without ever having put them into action. In the outside world of which we know so little the word "Christianity" has a meaning obscene with hypocrisy, and "democracy" has become a front word behind which anything can take place. The Four Freedoms remain shells, cast on the seashore by an ebbing tide and filled with hollow echoes. We are always reaching for new words, as children reach for the next toy, and then throwing them aside. "How do you break it?" a modern child inquired of a modern toy.

The newest phrase is "world-understanding." Clubs are planning programs on it and the lecturers are reshaping their old material. No, it seems that even the lecture, that stand-by of American adult education, is to be thrown aside. Study clubs are the newest toy. People are getting together to talk. But we Americans have always gotten together to talk, in country stores and ladies' aids and granges and lodges. We talk away our lives. There is no



action. The shells lie on the sands and the waves come up and fill them again and again. But the shells lie empty, holding nothing.

What have women to do with this? A good deal, I think. Women in other civilizations and indeed, in our own until recent years, have been the force for realism. Less emotional than men, more individualistic than men, infinitely more practical than men in terms of human life, women have through the centuries held in their hands the spiritual reins of their peoples. Men have loved best and most faithfully those women who are most worthy of love and faith. And to be worthy of man's love, woman has to be true to her deepest principles. Whenever she has lost her power as woman it has been because she has forsaken her own soul and has yielded to the soul of man. It is equally true, too, that where man has lost his power as man it is because he has yielded his soul to woman. Neither is ruler of the other. The union of man and woman has been closest, most satisfactory, and most fruitful when it has been part of the fulfillment of life itself—that is, when it became union for common and enlarging progress. No one woman can provide continuing interest for a man merely as an individual, neither can one man provide continuing interest for a woman as an individual. It is when together they contribute to a growing common life, a life larger than either one of them, or than both together, that the personal relationship deepens enough to make the hearts of the two forever one.

# V

## *Children and Education*

“WHAT KIND OF WOMEN OUGHT TO HAVE children?” I asked Eslanda.

This is a question to be asked in our country, but never in China. There it is taken for granted that every woman ought to have children. The sex experience is incomplete and even meaningless until it is fulfilled in the new generation.

“Some women can have ten children, and not be even a piece of a mother,” Eslanda mused.

“What is a mother?” I asked this American woman.

“Someone who wants children, and who is willing to take a constructive responsible interest in them. Just because a woman is physically able to have children does not make her a mother. And many women who are physically unable to have children make ideal mothers.”

“Isn’t it natural for women to want children?” I inquired.

“I don’t know what you mean by ‘natural,’ ” Eslanda replied.

I put my question in a different shape. “In China a child belongs to the past and to the future. Do our people, too, have a desire to see the next generation before their eyes, and thus feel the stream of endless humanity flow through themselves?”

“I don’t think we bother about such values.”

## AMERICAN ARGUMENT

"Then why do we have children?" I asked in some astonishment.

"No birth control," she said promptly.

"You think most American people have children accidentally?"

"Yes, I do," she said with decision.

I have reflected on this a great deal. If Eslanda is right, and I must say that her reply has been corroborated by a number of women with whom I have talked, then this means that it is the sex act alone which is here the most vivid communication between man and woman, and not the whole process of creating and caring for the child. If Eslanda is right, then this explains a great deal. It explains the extraordinary emphasis laid upon sexual attraction and attractiveness in our magazines, with their unreal romances, both in fiction and in advertisements. It certainly explains the preoccupation of American men and women with the limited physical aspects of sex, instead of their union in the natural and continuing life in the child. This fixation upon male and female, as though it were the end of life merely to be male and female, explains the general state of irritation between men and women in American life. It comes from frustration. Unless sex instincts are completely fulfilled in having children, not accidentally, but with the full purpose of creation, irritation is sure to arise. One sees it in prostitutes and roués. Such persons are out of the stream of life. The sex act brings two individuals together, not for the moment, but for continuing life. When the child is conceived and then born, this losing of the two selves continues in ever deeper measure, and in this process the life of the individuals themselves is fulfilled.

But of course instinct does its work in spite of all. Eslanda is certainly right—our individualistic Americans make individualistic marriages, in which the chief object is personal happiness. I doubt, however, that there would be no more American children even if birth control were

universally available. Many people, I believe most, would still want and have children. It may be that children are wanted for what they bring to the home. This would be in keeping with our individualistic attitudes. It is certainly not considered a duty here to have children, as it is in some other countries, in order that family, racial, or national life may persist. But children are and will be born, whatever the reason. Whether they are born to all kinds of people is another question.

I said to Eslanda—I confess with hesitation, since I still know too little about my own country, "Rich people here, I notice, usually have very few children. It is a pity, this! But perhaps it doesn't matter. So many things are provided free for children in America."

Eslanda interrupted me to disagree. "What things do we do, rich country that we are, for our American children? Universal nursery schools, kindergarten, playgrounds? No! Look at our juvenile delinquency—a frightening comment on how little we do for our children! I remember a speech made by an authority on child welfare in which she said that it is easier to get Federal aid for our aged than for our children—again perhaps because the aged have votes but the children don't!"

A certain grim look came over her normally gay countenance. "When I think of a child here, I see that he is not loved as he is in China, as he is in the Soviet Union, or in Africa. That doesn't mean he doesn't have a good life of a sort. He is dressed well because his parents are well dressed, he has a toy automobile because his mother has a car, and so on. He shares in the benefits of the nation, but he doesn't have organized, constructive consideration as a child."

"We have child-labor laws," I mentioned.

"That's what you think!" she retorted. "You should see the child labor in my state, Connecticut, during the tobacco season! It's disgraceful."

Later she sent me this item:

## AMERICAN ARGUMENT

State of Conn., Dept. of Labor, Dec. 19, 1946:

In view of the fact that women and children constitute a large part of the present day working force in Connecticut's tobacco industry, it is interesting to observe that history records tobacco as the only crop in which aborigines prohibited their women and children from engaging. . . . The 10 and 11 hour working day, coupled with the time spent in transportation, brought the overall day for children from Massachusetts to 13 to 14 hours. . . . For the past 14 years, the State Department of Labor has kept the people of the State informed on the conditions under which children, who constitute a third of the total labor force, work on the industrialized tobacco fields of large corporations. The reports prove conclusively that the small individual grower is practically non-existent, that the industry is largely operated by a few big corporations. . . . The Legislature has failed to protect the workers by statutory legislation. . . . To protect the interests of Connecticut children, the Department of Labor again strongly recommends the enactment of legislation which will limit the minimum working age to 14 years and the working hours to 8 a day and 48 a week. . . .

It is true that in our country there is no general universal plan for child welfare. Children in any totalitarian state have high value as potential human matériel. Doubtless there is universal planning in the Soviet Union. But in old countries such as China, India, and Africa, the value of the child to family survival has, curiously, somewhat the same basis as in the totalitarian state. That is, the child has a value beyond his own being. He is part of a continuing whole. Only in the individualistic democracies is the emphasis placed upon the child as a separate entity. As such he benefits in some ways and loses in others. He benefits by the benefits of the nation. He is endowed with life, even if accidentally, and he has enormous freedom from responsibilities, and in that freedom he may pursue happiness. Where he loses is in not understanding that he is part of humanity, that one hand holds

to the past generations while the other stretches to the future. He has no sense of his own continuity and his own importance in the human scheme of life. He feels responsible for no one except himself, and while this freedom adds gaiety to his youth it is balanced by undue depression when youth is gone. As he has felt no responsibility toward others, others feel no responsibility toward him.

Our old people are not happy, therefore. They grow old in spiritual and emotional isolation, and the shadows of death look dark to them. It is not good for the child to feel alone; neither is it good for the old. The old face a new birth, for death is change of some sort, the end of one existence, the beginning of another. What that existence is, no one knows. We do not know whether it is even conscious existence, for we do not know how universal consciousness is. It was in the city of Calcutta, in the laboratory of an Indian scientist, that I first saw recorded electrically the quiver of a carrot pierced by a pin. The surest human guidance that has been given to the future is that in our universe nothing is ever lost. Material changes, but it cannot cease to exist.

The child is terrified at birth, and when he is old, he faces the new birth of death again with terror. It is comfort to feel that one does not stand alone. There is something to be said against extreme individualism. One gets what one gives—no more.

When I ponder the case of the American child, I return again and again to the most cruelly treated child of all in our society, the so-called illegitimate child.

I do not consider orphanages and boarding homes, or foster homes, suitable places for children. Homes are not so important for children as are parents, and under our present social customs a child born out of wedlock has no real parents. The man and the woman who created him dare not acknowledge him. Any feeble effort at rehabilita-

tion of the mother and at trying to persuade the man to marriage are scarcely enough, once the child is born. It is then too late. The child has appeared in a world already hostile to him, and he is helpless. Orphanages and boarding homes may be the only shelter for children "not available for adoption," but vested interests in these institutions are now so powerful that the courts ought to examine the case of every child to see whether he is really not to be allowed to have parents and a normal atmosphere for childhood. For it is absurd to believe that orphanages and boarding homes can supply proper parents. There are no parents at all in orphanages, and in boarding homes parents, however kindly, are always transient. Moreover, the element of money is always to be considered with boarding homes. So much per week is paid per child. It is doubtless true that there are good men and women, genuinely fond of children, who enjoy making their living by caring for children, and who, within their limitations, do their best. But their best cannot compare to the adoptive parents, who want children and are prepared to work for the love of having them. I daresay there are evil individuals everywhere who will exploit children, but common sense would say that there are fewer among adoptive parents, who at least are not paid for taking a child, than among boarding-home keepers who profit by having as many children as they can.

There has been great outcry against the "black market in babies." What does any black market mean? Simply that the proper avenues are closed and therefore people must get what they want in other ways. The answer is to attack not black markets but the cause for them. There are thousands of childless married couples, good people with good homes, who want children to cherish as their own. In spite of overcrowded orphanages and boarding homes, these people cannot find children. Something is blocking the way. Institutions in any society should be constantly examined. The casual observer may exclaim

admiringly at the sight of orderly children in a clean, well-run orphanage or boarding home. But the thoughtful person asks, "Why are these children here? Where are their parents?" In some states twenty children in a boarding home constitute a job for a social worker. A child adopted and taken permanently from the twenty has to be replaced. Social workers must eat, too.

"Not available for adoption!" cry the vested interests in orphaned children. Why not available for adoption? It is time to examine the situation of such children in our American democracy. They are not free—not free to find good parents, if they have bad ones, not free to find parents if they have none. I know very well the argument. Feeble-minded children, defectives of any sort, should not be given to child-hungry, loving people, for hearts will be broken. But this excuse is too unctuously and easily spoken. It is specious more often than not. Thousands of normal children are being *held* in orphanages and boarding homes.

Their own parents are still living? What sort of parents? Yes, sometimes a worthy family gets into temporary difficulties and the children need shelter until the home is righted. But for a few such cases there are scores, perhaps hundreds, of children whose natural parents are irresponsible and will never make a home. Again and again such children return to a temporary makeshift home, only to be deserted once more. How long are these children to endure such parents? Are they never to be free to find true parents who will love them and give them care? Are men and women parents because accidentally they give birth to a child? Is the child to suffer from them all his life because of this accident, when other parents want him and will care for him gladly?

I know whereof I speak. Once, longing for a daughter, we took into our home a little girl whose "natural" mother had deserted her several times, although she was less than four years old. The father, for the pair were married,



had run away. No one knew where he was. Mary came to us a pale, frightened waif, ill and undernourished. In six months she was a new child. Good food, sunshine, and love had made her over. The colorless little personality developed robustness and mischief. She learned to laugh and run and play. We found she was an intelligent child. But she was "not available for adoption." At the end of six months we were told that the "natural" mother wanted her back. With what agony did I pack the trunk with the pretty new clothes, the toys, the vitamins! I put in a letter, without a name, telling the "natural" mother just what our little daughter needed. Remembering her tattered snow suit when she came to us, I put in winter clothes, too. We watched her go away while we wept. We could not take her ourselves and we sent her to the meeting place with an aunt whom she loved. Auntie came back weeping, too. "She didn't want to go to that woman," she told us. She couldn't say mother. "The little thing screamed when she saw her and clung to my neck—the hardest thing I ever did—I had to tear her arms away—it just broke my heart."

I was able to keep track of our little girl for a while. I found that none of the loving instructions were kept. The pretty clothes were soon gone—lost, pawned—I don't know. The child was soon running on the city streets, dirty and uncared for. Within two months she was deserted again, picked up, put into an orphanage. She has been taken out, deserted, put back. Still she is "not available for adoption." It is too late now. She is no more a little girl.

How long can a man or a woman claim a child? When do they cease to be parents? The law should consider the child. One desertion, perhaps, can be forgiven. The second desertion by "natural" parents should make a child available for adoption by better parents. But vested interests will protest, for they fatten on children who are deserted by "natural" parents.

Yes, Eslanda is right—Americans do not do enough for the children.

In China at least there were no illegitimate children. When a man wanted a woman other than his wife he legalized her relationship to him and the position of their children by making her a concubine. In Africa, Eslanda told me, there is polygamy, and in normal African society there are no illegitimate children. In France, she reminded me, if paternity can be proved, the child of a Frenchman is always legal. I know that our highly individualized American society could not tolerate open polygamy. And yet the mother of a child should somehow be legalized. I asked Eslanda, "Is there any way to legalize the illegitimate child, under monogamy?"

She answered with vigor. "I think it is stupid, cruel, and ridiculous to blame children for illegitimacy. Men should be forced to accept responsibility for their children."

"But what should be the stated relationship?" I persisted.

"Share in the father's property, the father held responsible for the support and education of the child. This need have nothing to do with his wife." So Eslanda declared.

"Yet what would be the effect of this on the wife?" I asked.

"I imagine the average wife would want to see the matter settled and the child cared for," she replied, "not necessarily by her, unless she wanted it and the other woman didn't."

I doubted whether this would be the average American wife's attitude. Were it so our foundling homes and boarding homes would not be stuffed with children. I said, "The Chinese woman accepted concubines but the American woman is very possessive. She would expect to have equal rights. She would say to the man, 'If you take a secondary wife, I will have a secondary husband.'"

"And why not?" Eslanda inquired. "Plenty of women

## AMERICAN ARGUMENT

secretly have a secondary husband and plenty of women have passed off their own illegitimate children as legitimate. Some husbands have said, 'That's not my child,' but it's very hard to prove. 'It's a wise child who knows his own father.' "

"These things are said, but are they accepted?"

"More condoned than accepted."

"In what groups?"

"In any group!"

"You give me a dark picture, Eslanda."

"I think the darkest part of it is that we insist we're something we are not. We insist we are monogamous, but we are not. And the dangerous thing is that we build our social structure upon this false base, and so we have confusion, the double standard, resentment, and dishonesty between the sexes. I think it absolutely essential for women as well as men, to be able to find interest, companionship, and joy in other human beings. Very few individuals are many-faceted enough, complete enough, to satisfy all the needs of another individual. In marriage one settles for the greatest common area of mutual affinity, and then one picks up the bits and pieces elsewhere. And by bits and pieces I don't necessarily mean sex relationships. For myself it would mean good talk, a good bridge partner, a good dancing partner."

I asked, "Why do American men and women seem to use sex as their chief mode of expression?"

"Some people make a business of sex. I think normally it should be incidental, part of a much larger pattern. I consider love a very important department of human relations, and sex definitely a subdivision of that department."

Eslanda believes, I think, that liking rather than what is commonly called love is the basis for good human relationships. "You have to like a person a great deal to want him around for most of the time," she said. "Of

course I love my son Pauli very much, but I also like him very, very much, as a person. I think children know if you like them, and it makes a great difference in your relationship with them. And that of course brings us right back to human relationships. People *know* whether you like them or not, and it makes a difference, especially to people you live with, or work with, in the home or in the office. For instance, in many homes there are relatives who simply can't get along together because they don't like each other. Sometimes men dislike their wives, children dislike their parents, men or women dislike their parents-in-law, servants dislike the mistress of the house, or vice versa. This kind of thing ruins many a home. All because we Americans just say that relatives love each other, but don't do anything about making it possible for them to do so!"

"Is there any difference in the way you like your husband, your child, your mother?" I asked.

"I daresay it sounds strange," Eslanda said, "but I don't think there is much difference. You like people, or you don't like them, no matter what the blood or legal ties may be. It seems to me that we do not face this fact."

In my effort to find out what Americans are as human beings, I had continually to return to Eslanda's own personal life, as an example. No life is a true example of any other, but Eslanda's has concentrated, in a peculiar fashion, the problems and possibilities that can be called really American. Thus she has experienced and surmounted the fact of being a Negro. She has experienced and surmounted the fact of being a woman. She has experienced and surmounted being the wife of a famous and successful man. She is the successful mother of a handsome and brilliant son, gifted in his own right. She has had all the handicaps and all the opportunities of American life, and she has made a success of herself. She is still growing and developing.

## AMERICAN ARGUMENT

"Did you give up your job when Pauli was born?" I asked next.

"I wasn't working when Pauli was born," she replied. "I gave up my job when we went abroad to play *The Emperor Jones*. We stayed abroad for six months, and when we returned to America, I was too busy with Paul's work to go back to the laboratory. I was still the manager. Pauli was born in November, 1927, while Paul and Larry were in Paris, for concerts. I stayed home and had the baby. Paul came back when Pauli was three months old. Pauli was fascinated with his father's great size and gentleness—there seemed to be so much of him! When Pauli was crawling around on the floor, he used to put his little head back and gaze up with delight at the height of his father. When Paul would drop down on the floor to play with him, Pauli was still delighted at how much of him there was, how big his hands were, how deep his voice was, how long his legs were.

"When Pauli was five months old, Paul got the role in the English production of *Showboat*. I went to London with him, and we left Pauli with my mother in America, because we didn't know how long we'd be away. When the show proved such a phenomenal success and looked as though it would run indefinitely, I fetched Pauli and Mama, and we all settled down to live in London."

I pictured the American family living in that greatest of all cities. "Are you accepted more easily abroad if you don't say you are American?"

"Yes! Americans are afraid to treat Negroes badly abroad, if they think the Negroes are 'foreign,' not American—that is, when they meet them socially. Americans carry their color and other prejudices right along with them when they travel. It seems a pity. They can be very offensive. I remember one night at Drury Lane, when Paul had come off stage from his performance in *Showboat*, Lady Astor came back to his dressing room with her husband and son. You know Lady Astor is the former

Nancy Langhorne, from Virginia. We had never seen her before, but she waded right in and addressed Paul by his first name. Paul was already quite a celebrity and greatly respected in England as an artist, and I remember that we were both a little startled by her informality, in a rather formal London. Lady Astor went on blithely to tell us all about her Negro mammy. Although both her husband and son tried to stop her, she went on, saying they didn't understand these things! 'But Paul understands, he's from the South.' I said quietly that we were both born in the North, but she came back with 'But your people came from the South.' She was hopeless, and we got rid of her as quickly and as tactfully as possible. Her husband and son seemed well bred. They were pleasant and respectful."

"Did you find keeping house in England easier than here at home?" I asked.

"Yes, I did," Eslanda replied. "The house was easier to run because things were better organized for life than they are here."

I had lived in England myself, and I knew that there, as in China, household help, until the war, was easy to get and docile to manage.

"Are you being quite fair?" I asked. "English women, too, are appalled at the amount of housework the average American housewife does herself."

I was back to housework again, but this was not Eslanda's point. Household help or not, she feels that American women do not organize themselves for life as they have to live it.

"In fact," she said vigorously, "I think our whole system of education is nonsense—stupid and expensive. It isn't designed for living. If the average American girl is going to marry and settle down to housekeeping, why can't she learn how to do this job while she is in school and college? I think every girl should learn scientific modern housekeeping, no matter what career she plans to follow. She's

going to have to live in a house or a flat, whether she becomes a teacher, works in an office, or has a professional career. If she can afford help in the house, she will be able to organize the work for her helpers, if she herself is scientifically trained. We say education should be preparation for life, but sometimes I think American education is for show, for prestige, and is not practical. Look at the thousands of college men who take the 'general' course, and then become salesmen, and the thousands of girls who take the same course, and then become housewives! It's wasteful."

"Don't you think that a general course makes a better individual?"

"On the contrary, I think it makes a discontented, maladjusted individual. You have only to look at the results. Having finished college, boys and girls expect something wonderful to happen to them. They have not been properly prepared for what is going to happen to them. So they are disappointed and frustrated. I think if they had a more practical type of education to fit them for the kind of life they will probably have to lead, it would make for a better individual."

"You took domestic science at college. Did that help you?"

"Of course—it helped enormously. It taught me how to organize myself and my work. Every girl ought so to be taught. Men ought to be taught something about the house, too. The accent could be on cooking and child-care for the woman, and on marketing, budgeting, house and car repairs for the man.

"Another thing that both men and women should be taught is the social custom that will give them ease in any society. That ought to go into an early school, so that when a child is in school he will not only learn how to read and write, but he will also learn how to behave, how to get up, how to take a compliment, how to sit down—how to behave, in short. In my part of the country, the children

don't even know how to receive compliments. Somebody pays them a compliment and they say 'Uhhuh.' That's all! If someone says, 'How pretty you look,' or, 'How well you do it,' one should not be confounded by the praise.

"I think that learning how to conduct oneself is a necessary part of education. It is a normal part of the educational systems I know in other countries. Most American children have no manners at all, and some of those who have been to private schools are often self-conscious about their manners." Here Eslanda laughed. "A very nice boy who comes to our house sometimes drives me frantic with his bouncing up and down when I come in the room. He makes his manners a business. Good manners are not supposed to make one a nuisance—they are customs designed to show consideration, respect, and friendliness. One day at home I was rushing in and out of a room, doing things, and every time I came this boy jumped up and remained standing. At last I said, 'Never mind, honey, don't bother, but thank you just the same.' Pauli said to me later, 'Mama dear, I don't think you like him.' I said, 'What makes you say that? I like him very much.' 'Well,' Pauli said, 'sometimes there's *not liking* in the air when you come into the room with him.' I laughed and said, 'Oh, that! That's only when he works so hard at his manners.' 'I never heard of such a thing,' Pauli said. 'Well, you hear of it now,' I said, and explained what I meant."

"Why is the boy that way?" I asked.

"He went to a private school, and apparently he took the manners too seriously, or they were badly taught, and he wanted to be sure to get them just right."

"In China," I said, remembering, "a child is taught at home and at school. He knows, for example, which chair he is to sit in. He would not sit in his father's chair. He might sit in it when his father is not there, but he knows where he is to sit when his father is there and he does not feel inferior. To know gives security to an individual."

Eslanda picked this up. "I think general good manners



## AMERICAN ARGUMENT

should be taught right from infancy, so everyone will know how easy and pleasant it is to behave well, and thus avoid a lot of uncomfortable self-consciousness. Manners are just social tools—or should be—and everyone needs them all the time as a matter of course, just as everyone needs to know how to walk and talk and read and write and figure. So many Americans have degrees, but don't know how to behave."

"What does that mean?" I asked.

"It means that we need a different kind of education, and a different kind of responsibility placed upon the teacher."

"In China," I offered again, "the responsibility on the teacher is much more than it is here. The training of a child's character becomes the teacher's life."

"In the Soviet Union, too, the responsibility on the teacher is very heavy," Eslanda said.

Several times Eslanda had spoken with enthusiasm of the way something was done in the Soviet Union, where she and her husband had visited in the course of his professional work, and where they had lived for a time. I knew we would have to face each other on the Soviet Union one day, but this was not the day and I did not interrupt her while she went on talking.

"We Americans have different objectives for our education. Our teachers are responsible for preparing the students to pass examinations. That seems to be the objective we set long ago, before we knew better, and nobody has changed them. I think our teaching system is very bad."

"Why?"

"The average teacher is underpaid, has too long hours, too large classes, and lots of homework as well as class-work. They get tired out, just as housewives do, and they are deserting the teaching profession just as women are trying to desert housewifery. Teachers should be care-

fully selected, for personality as well as training, should be well paid and given shorter hours and smaller classes. Then they could take on more responsibility for their pupils."

"Who is responsible for their present plight?"

She replied, "Look at the personnel of boards of education everywhere in America and you will find that the ones with the real power are old and reactionary. They seem to be frozen into their jobs—politically or bureaucratically. Our women as usual are apathetic about the situation, and just don't bother. Of course there are a few private progressive schools scattered about the country for the children of people who care enough to do something about the lamentable situation. But they are the exception, not the rule."

I agree that our system of education is not good enough for a great people. Much of it is worse than impractical—it is a waste of time. It is still not American education. Our educational leaders, generally speaking, have knocked together a system based on the old dull drilling methods of the Germans, embellished with a few fancy modern frills. A few great educational thinkers have introduced some new ideas designed for American life, but these have not been tried out in any thorough-going fashion. They have been pieced onto what we had. The result is that our people are miserably educated. They don't know how to do anything well enough. Too many of them do not even know how to read well enough to continue reading after school. They know even less about writing in plain serviceable English. Yet reading and writing are the foundation of any education. Not to be able to read as easily as one breathes means that the mind is limited and cannot progress. The best of any civilization is in its books. The greatest human thoughts have been preserved in books. Not to be able to understand through reading

puts the average citizen of our land at the mercy of priest and demagogue.

When I tried to find out why it is that so few of our citizens read for pleasure and information, why so many of them try to get what they need through the ear by radio, through the eye by comic books and motion pictures, I came to the conclusion that the basic fault is that they are never taught to read in school. Instead of mastering this basic tool, our children's time is filled with a lot of meaningless group activity of one sort or another and far too many "subjects."

Reading should never be a "subject." It should be the child's occupation in school until he can read anything anywhere. I should like to see the first years of school devoted to varied forms of reading, varied only so that the child would not weary. I would not even have the child at first read for what he could learn by reading. Let him simply read, alone and silently, aloud with his group, in unison like a chant, to music in songs, in dramatized reading of plays—not memorizing but reading—reading to the rhythms of march and movement, connecting the printed word with all he does. Let this take as long as it will. Once the printed word is mastered, once the child reads quickly, instinctively, and in paragraphs and pages, he will begin to read for ideas. Then education proceeds swiftly. Even writing is easy when once reading is a habit.

As it is now, the process of education goes haltingly and stupidly for all but the few natural readers among us. There are a few children who are so visual minded and so strong in visual memory that they can learn to read almost without instruction. But most people are not so; they learn with the utmost difficulty because they never learn to read. The fact that an arithmetic problem is in printed words makes them slow at something which, otherwise, they might be swift to perform. History is

agony because they have to read. Even science is obscured by faulty reading.

This inability to handle the primary tool of education makes the child hopelessly at a loss as he goes on, and feeling his incompetence he blames it on school and books, and too often comes out of the experience hating education. That very word is generally hateful to Americans, and is carefully avoided by most persons selling goods or promoting causes.

I believe, therefore, that the major weakness of American education today is that our people have never learned to read easily. Having no foundation, they cannot be educated properly or continue their own adult education as they should. As a result, we are an ill-informed people, ignorant of other cultures, lacking in general knowledge, dwelling in prejudices from which we cannot free ourselves because we are at the mercy of what we hear around us.

I agree with Eslanda in what she says about teachers and the teaching profession. But I do not believe that raising the salaries will produce better teachers. Higher wages certainly have not produced better workmen in our industrial system. Indeed, the reverse may be true. A man protected by his union can count on high wages for less work and for more shoddy work than would be accepted had he to stand alone. The average American laborer today cannot compete with laborers in other parts of the world for industry and honest craftsmanship. He has to be protected by unions and tariffs.

Seldom have I any interest in the financial pages of newspapers, but the name of Japan caught my eye, a few months ago, upon the financial page of one of our great dailies. Producers of cotton goods in the United States were protesting the importation of cotton goods from Japan. The American Army of Occupation, it seems, in its effort to restore the financial stability of Japan, had

taught American textile techniques to the Japanese cotton industry with such success that the mills were producing cottons of finer quality than the Americans can produce and at far lower cost. The Army wanted to import the Japanese goods into the United States to strengthen Japan's position in dollar exchange. Upon protest, I learned later, much of the excellent and cheap cotton goods was sent to Asia. Americans must content themselves with inferior goods at high prices.

No, increasing salaries will not bring better teachers. Teaching, here in the United States, is an easy job. There is little supervision. Standards are low and almost anybody can get a teaching job. Holidays are frequent and vacations are long. The truth is that we already pay too much for what we are getting. The behavior of the average soldiers abroad, during the war, was proof enough of the miserable inadequacy of our school system. The full enormity of this behavior has never been made public and I do not propose to make it public, now. But the facts have percolated to enough serious-minded people to make them realize that there must be a radical reform in American education. The place to begin is in the teachers' colleges and training schools. Higher salaries, of course, but first the reform has to be made in the quality of the teachers. Teaching must be made into a lifetime profession for men as well as women, not a stopgap livelihood for girls waiting for husbands and a refuge for women without husbands.

There was a time in our history when it was an honor to be a teacher, an honor even to go to school. Today teachers have lost the respect of the public and education is a hated word.

We must begin to build reverence for learning and knowledge. The place to begin is with teachers. Teachers must be men and women chosen for trained intelligence

and character. Character must include courage and integrity—courage to protest against such abuse as the schools being used by politicians, integrity to consider the children first.

## VI

### *What It Means to Be Human*

"DO YOU THINK THE EDUCATION OF AMERICAN women ought to be the same as that of men?" I asked Eslanda.

"Of course it should be," she replied. "I said education should be for life. For some this means vocational education, for others professional, artistic—whatever is needed."

"In our United States women truly do not have as much opportunity as men?"

"No, they don't. There are many prejudices against women in our country. For instance, we never had a woman member of the cabinet until Frances Perkins. Imagine such backwardness! In many other countries capable women are recognized and given responsibilities in government, in business, and in industry. And why not, with women about one half the population of the earth? It's nonsense to say they aren't capable. I'll wager that some of the women secretaries to our big financiers, industrialists, and government officials know more about the work than their bosses."

"Well, why aren't there more women members of the cabinet?" I asked.

She looked thoughtful. "It could be the old story of 'you can't eat your cake and have it, too.' The generally accepted attitude in America is that a woman gets her share when she gets a husband, a home, and works like a dog for them ever afterward with no salary. If she doesn't

land a husband, she is looked down upon as an old maid, a spinster, and a failure as a woman. So, I daresay in self-defense, she concentrates too much on getting a husband, and doesn't go out enough for other things."

"She goes after security," I said.

"What our society considers security—for a woman," she amended.

"What she gets is scarcely security. The American woman is more insecure than any woman on earth, I fear. Handicapped by men and by the prejudices of her own sex against her, she works in inferior positions in industry and the professions. She ages industrially very early."

Nor is she more secure in the home. She is dependent completely upon one man, who may himself be a low-wage earner or unsteady in employment, who may divorce her, or who may simply die, leaving her with nothing except children. The man's family is not responsible for her after the man dies, as they are in China, where a daughter-in-law has her fixed place in her husband's family after his death as before, her shelter and food assured and her children cared for and educated to the best of the family's ability.

"And housekeeping," Eslanda was saying, "a full-time job, is a very difficult one and wives are put in the position of being 'kept.' They really should get a salary. Instead, they have degraded themselves to ask—even beg—for money, and when they get tired of asking, or are too embarrassed to ask, they often pad the bills in order to get what money they need. I've heard that some of the expensive, exclusive shops make a practice of deliberately overcharging the wives of wealthy, stingy men, then splitting the amount of the overcharge with the wife."

"Do you think money is the chief problem between American men and women?" I asked.

"Money and sex," Eslanda replied.

Now I thought of men I know who work hard to support a home they do not enjoy, wives who are not pleasant,



children who are disrespectful. There is something to be said for American men, too, and if I were one I am not sure that I would marry at all. I put the question to Eslanda.

"What does a man get out of marriage?"

"If he's lucky," Eslanda said, "he gets children and a well-run home. If he contributes interest as well as money, he may also get companionship and interest in return."

Eslanda uses the word "homework" to mean the hard, private, individual effort which one has to apply to achieve any desired end. I used it now. "What is the essential homework an American man has to do to make his marriage good?"

"One sure rule," she replied, "is that he must make up his mind what he wants out of his marriage. If he wants companionship, he will have to be a companion; if he wants interest, he will have to manifest interest; if he wants affection, he will have to be affectionate. If he wants any other special kind of contribution from his wife, he will have to make a special contribution to her also. Sometimes I think men are idiots! Most men want to go places and do the things they like. A husband may want to go bowling, and his wife may want to go to the movies, or go dancing; yet he will think he is being wonderful to her if he takes her bowling with him. If he had any sense, he'd take turns—go bowling one night, go to the movies another night, and go dancing once in a while. Or, if he wanted to be progressive, they could go separately to the places they like, and do the things they like. Then, having really enjoyed himself and herself, they could happily compare notes, and have a wonderful time together doing so."

I asked for information. "It is not necessary, then, for American married couples always to do the same things together?"

"Of course not! But Americans are too much concerned with appearances. If husband and wife go out separately, what will so-and-so think, what will the neighbors say?"

I've got to the point where I really don't care what people think about me. I realize that people are not going to live my life for me. I'm going to live it myself. Of course I insist on not looking for trouble, and not inviting unfavorable criticism, if one can help it. We manage to have a lot of fun in our home, because we live our own lives the way we want to live them. So much so that we find it quite a jolt when we take in strangers! We feel that so much we do is unorthodox and might not be understood. We don't care, but we don't want to bother with explanations."

"I think that a great many American families are like yours, more than you realize," I said. "I remember a visitor from another country was so astonished when he found Americans friendly, but always glad when he left. He told me that once he had been in a home where the people were charming to him. After he had left, he found he had forgotten his hat. When he went back for it he found them dancing around the room singing, 'He's gone, he's gone!' At first he was hurt. He took his hat from the hall table and slipped away without letting them see him. Yet as he thought it over he decided that it was not dislike of him at all, but just their love of being alone and themselves."

Eslanda remarked, "The kind of thing I dislike very much in the American home—I don't find it so much in European homes—is where there is an elegant 'front parlor' which is kept for show and not for living. It is rarely used except for company to impress people, and where there is an elegant dining room and—"

"Everybody eats in the kitchen." I put in.

"Exactly! I like a kitchen, if it's cozy. But all the rooms in a house should be lived in."

I do not take this too seriously. The housing situation, if nothing else, is forcing people to live in every room and use all they have. But it is more than the housing situation. We are really growing more independent rather than less. The automobile, I suppose, began it. We no longer have to stay fixed in a neighborhood. The trend

toward country living has helped, too. People who live in the country, even today, are compelled to, or even delight in, solitude and individualism. The trend is away from the old 'keeping up with the Joneses' tradition, mainly, I think, because we are a physically mobile people. While it has been said that the automobile destroys family life, it is certainly true that it has kept the family together on trips and outings. Family solidarity has only changed its mode. With better radio programs and with television, family life is likely to have more rather than less solidarity. Even the lack of servants has contributed to the solidarity of family life, especially as it is beginning to dawn on women that husbands and children can and should—and will, if properly guided—help appreciably with the work of maintaining the home.

Eslanda manages her home well and seems to have time to do what she likes, besides. In my own fashion I might say, modestly, that I also find there really are twenty-four hours in the day, even when one has a home, a big family, and a job or two.

Also Eslanda and I have, we find, the same secret of getting time in which to do what we like. It lies in the long word, organization—a hateful word to many women, perhaps to all women, until they learn that it spells freedom for them.

"There is no work that cannot be organized," she declared. "Women allow leakage in their day, and then say they can't get any free time. If a woman knows what she has to do, she can get up at any hour in the morning in order not to let her day get ahead of her. There should be one day when she doesn't get up at a certain time. Irregularity is fun and helpfully relaxing, but she must not get behind schedule. I think most people have no respect for time. They won't have a schedule. This is lack of self-control and it breeds inferiority, especially in women. They never admit it, but always say they have no time. Actually if you count the foolish books and silly magazines

they read, you will find a lot of time wasted. It's all right to read them sometimes, for they are relaxing— but don't let them leak away the time. It is organization that counts."

I mused aloud, "I wonder if there is some way whereby women in the home can be brought back into the world, instead of pocketed there? Even though a woman may enjoy housework, as I do, myself, she gets mentally stagnant if there is nothing else. She begins to feel inferior when she is in the presence of other women more intellectually alert, and this creates a dangerous division in women.

"In Germany it was the housewives who helped to put Hitler in power, and one reason why they did so was that they were jealous of the women who had risen to places of influence under the Republic.\* Hitler said he would put them all down, and he did. You remember, Eslanda, how I felt the danger in Washington when the woman who said she represented two million home women wanted universal military training in our country.

"I think the quickest way to mend this dangerous division among women is by helping the women who apparently can't help themselves. Is there any way that a community can make a woman feel that even her home is part of the community effort? How can we make her feel that she can do a national and international job in her home—for her own sake?"

Eslanda was as baffled by this as I am. We talked together for a while about it, searching for the groups in our society who could offer rewards sufficient to rouse the interest of the home woman so that she might enjoy the fullness of her life in our world—and thereby enrich, too, the life of the world. I dallied with the idea that women's colleges should do something to keep apathy away at least from their alumnae, and this might act as a leaven.

For both Eslanda and I realize that apathy is the atmos-

---

\* See *How It Happens*, by Pearl S. Buck, with Erna von Pustau.

## AMERICAN ARGUMENT

phere in which most American women live, mental and spiritual, if not physical.

"One can make suggestions and offer opportunities," she said at last, "and then if women won't do anything about their discontent they'll just have to remain discontented. If they won't organize their work so they can get even one hour off from their routine to use for what they want to do—why, we will just have to leave them to their frustration. Perhaps I'm not the one to talk, because for years I've been trying to organize my day so I can get a nap, or at least a complete rest at some point during the day. I still haven't achieved that but I have compromised by accumulating newspapers and magazines beside the divan, and every day I sit down and put my feet up for an hour and read them. That's not a complete rest, but it's better than nothing."

"How many hours of sleep do you take at night?" I asked, because it seems to me many American women sleep more than is needful.

"Seven to eight hours. All the rest of the time I'm working at full speed, and that's a little too much. I still haven't found a way to break that habit. There are too many things I want to do. I have always overplanned my time, ever since I was sixteen. Every night when I go to bed I read a mystery story or some nonsense, to take my mind off my own merry-go-round before I go to sleep."

Eslanda has not a vestige of apathy in her vigorous frame, and it is natural that she does not comprehend its causes. For apathy is a real disease. It attacks the frustrated mind, the unwilling body. It brings decay which is irremediable, unless checked. It is often combined with neurotism. I put the question under another guise.

"Why are so many American women neurotic?"

"It's an easy way to get attention, it's an easy alibi for lack of accomplishment, and they seem to get away with it. If my husband came home to a lot of upset and complaining, he would simply turn around and go right out again.

That is what men should do, and the women would soon stop it. You'd see!"

"Why in our civilization do adult people want attention?"

This was no idle question. The love of publicity is something new to me. In Chinese society publicity for individual or family was disliked. A person became well known in spite of himself. There are many ancient Chinese proverbs about the prudence of not lifting one's head above one's neighbors. The real reason, however, is the Chinese love of privacy and freedom. A public figure is always responsible to the public, and with responsibility comes bondage. A man in the public eye in China must, for very pride's sake, behave with dignity. I do not see the same sense of obligation here, however, among my countrymen and women who crave public notice. Yet there never was a public more relentless in its judgment than the American. I wonder that those among us who are hungry for public notice do not take deep thought.

For we Americans have no bump of reverence for anybody. We ridicule any misstep, and our scrutiny of the great or the conspicuous is ruthless. Worship is foreign to us. No name is secure here. This has its good as well as its bad fruits. It keeps down the conceit of those who rise high, and it assuages the envy of those who cannot rise. On the debit side, it has destroyed in us, as a people, the ability to wonder or revere, and this means a loss of idealism. And loss of idealism reduces life to a fairly flat level.

Eslanda said in her downright fashion, "When one deserves attention, one gets it. That's a great thing here. When people don't do their homework, don't deliver the goods, they feel self-conscious about that failure, and want to be told they haven't failed. Instead of worrying so much about attention and respect, people should do something to deserve attention and respect, then they'd get it. It's too simple. If they don't earn attention, they know it, and this knowledge makes them uncomfortable, and finally neu-

rotic. They disintegrate—then they go to psychiatrists.” Eslanda looked scornful and went on, “A friend of mine is being psychoanalyzed. I asked her exactly what happens during her treatments. She said, ‘Oh, I talk and talk about myself, and try to find out what’s the matter.’ I see no change in her, except that she seems to be having a good time talking about herself. Instead of getting dressed, going to his office, and paying him fees, what she needs to do is to sit down, organize her life and her work, and then she’d be fine. But no, she expects the psychiatrist to do this for her. I think it’s silly, even pathetic. How can he do it if she won’t? She knows herself better than he does. She knows all the circumstances, all the angles, all the whys. Why should she spend money to tell him all about these things, and probably bore him to death? I’d love to know what psychiatrists think privately about their patients. They must be pretty cynical about people! Yes, it may easily become a racket, but a racket for the patient more than for the psychiatrists. The patients will try to shift all their responsibilities over to the psychiatrist, and blame him if they don’t and won’t cope properly with their own lives and problems.”

“Where is the discipline coming from, though, Eslanda? You’re a strong woman, I’m a strong woman, but we can’t say that everybody is like us or wants to be like us. We’re being what we want to be.”

“That’s it exactly!” she cried. “Within reason, every woman can be what she wants to be. Of course I can’t be Queen of the May, or Cleopatra, or Madame Curie, so why should I bother to try? I try for something I know I can be, work at it, and accomplish it and so feel integrated. I feel I can be interesting, pleasant, well-informed, sympathetic, and contributing. Anybody can be that, within limits, if they work at it. But what Americans do is to set a general standard, a general ideal that only the very few can reach. They insist that this standard, this ideal is for everybody. Then millions feel frustrated because they

can't reach it. Everyone seems to want to live life as it is shown in the movies; millions of waitresses and clerks hope to become stars, millions of office boys and salesmen hope to become rich, even to become President—all because some few have said this is the way it is, and no one has bothered to contradict the statement. When a girl who has listened to the interminable junk on the radio, or read the advertisements everywhere about how young and pretty she can always be, finds that after cleaning house, getting meals, and having babies she is looking worn and certainly not glamorous, she is disappointed, and then she says she doesn't feel well. Before you know it, she says she's an invalid, and will be one if she can get away with it. We ought to say to that girl, 'Look, honey, you go right on being an invalid if that's what you want to be, but run along to a home for invalids and don't stay out here cluttering up the traffic.' Imagine what the children and husbands of such women have to endure, listening to their everlasting complaining!"

"You have a point there," I said.

"It's much too obvious a point. If I'm ill, I want to go to the hospital, and ought to go. If I want to lose weight, I want to go to a reducing place. I don't want to spend my time complaining about being ill or being overweight."

"If I were to sum up your philosophy so far, I would say, 'You have to work at it,' " I said.

Eslanda smiled. "The nicest thing Pauli ever said about me was that I do my homework. I felt that was a great compliment. You can't get everything in life. You have to settle for what you can get, and do the best you can with that. The reason for many of our difficulties may be that we want too much, and won't work for and appreciate what we can get."

"So we start drifting," I said. "In America people can drift, but in some countries they would starve. Why should we drift?"

"We get a lot of things anyway, being a rich country.



In poorer countries they have to organize, in order to make the most of what little there is."

"Let's talk about the people who don't have so much. Take Negroes—do they just share in the American habit of drifting? People from the South tell me that Negroes are shiftless."

"Don't you believe them," Eslanda retorted. "If Negroes were shiftless, they would never have survived. Negroes have less, because they are paid less for more work. They live in poor houses in poor neighborhoods, because they are prevented from living in better ones. They work at unskilled jobs because they are deliberately not accepted or trained for skilled ones. That's a far cry from being shiftless. Quite the contrary! We Negroes have to organize much more than the average white American, in order to survive at all. Mind you, I won't deny that there are shiftless Negroes—of course there are. I'm saying that Negroes as a whole are definitely not shiftless, or they wouldn't be where they are today."

"Would you say the average Negro is better educated than the average white person?" I asked.

"Yes, I think that Negroes are better educated than the white people in the same economic and social position. The Negro, and the foreign born, too, organizes the home more, perhaps because he has to in self defense, since he is always under outside pressures."

"Then in what we call the Deep South, the average Negro who gets almost nothing to eat and has a ragged suit of clothing, actually has to plan to get what little he has. Instead of doing a little, he does a tremendous lot for what he has and on what he has. Even if he had to, a white man couldn't do as well, perhaps?"

"It would take some practice and experience for the white man to do as well. It is an accepted convention that Negroes don't need as much as white people. This convention was laid down, originally, in order to try to justify paying Negroes lower wages, or no wages. Of course we

Negroes know we are human beings and have the same physiological, psychological, and sociological needs as other human beings. But we have been so vilified and kicked around that many of us have developed a more realistic approach to life than white people have. For example, a white slattern can go to the movies, or read the advertisements, or listen to the radio, and optimistically she can persuade herself that wonderful romantic things may happen to her just because she is white, and therefore 'superior.' So she sits back and hopes and dreams that they will happen, but doesn't do anything toward making them happen. Has she not been told at every opportunity that she belongs to the 'superior race', no matter how inferior she may be? But a Negro girl goes to the same movies, reads the same advertisements, and listens to the same junk on the radio, but she knows these things may not happen to her, unless she goes out and does something special to make them happen. Has she not been told at every opportunity that she is less than human, inferior, no matter how superior she may be? We Negroes have to prove ourselves, and this pressure is a constant challenge and stimulation."

"The Negro has no dreams?"

"Not the usual dreams! We all know this 'big conversation just ain't so!'"

"Do you feel any inclination in white people to change or wake up?"

"Yes, I do. Some of them realize the danger of drifting. They see the results of it."

"What would you tell the white people to do?"

"I really don't know because it seems so simple and obvious to me. They must face facts, face reality, the facts of life and the realities of science. They must be realistic and not get lost in the psychological maze of misleading themselves, of saying one thing and doing another. I remember vividly a line from a play Paul did many years ago. The play was *Black Boy*, and was about a Negro prize-

fighter. The last line of the play went something like this: A white friend said to the discouraged Negro, 'Let's go to California, out there it is the Japs they hate.' It was clear to me then, that white people don't hate Negroes, Jews, or the foreign born as such. They only feel the need to hate someone because they haven't integrated themselves."

"I don't find this particular thing about color in other countries," I remarked. "The Chinese dislike the white coloring because it is pale to them, and they say our eyes are wild animal eyes. They think that we are plain ugly, and that this is our misfortune. But where did this notion of ours about color come from?"

"That's easy," Eslanda replied. "It began in modern times anyway, with the conquest and enslavement of Africa and the East. In order to try to justify their nervous so-called Christian consciences, white Europeans laid down the convention that black peoples are savages, dark peoples are inferior and less than human, or at least a low order of the human species, and therefore could be treated, worked, exploited as animals. Entirely ignoring human history and anthropological and physiological truths, white Europeans have just laid it down that they are superior, and their coloring and hair texture are the criterions of beauty. And thus began their own disintegration. Because white people won't face and accept their own responsibilities, they say that Negroes are stupid and ignorant."

I asked, "Have you thought about why clever people are clever?"

"Because they are educated, of course," she replied, "either in schools or more practically by experience."

"There you are at education again," I said. "I really don't think you realize sufficiently the difficulties which American women face, at least in getting the education they need. They have few rewards in life—remember that none of the high positions can possibly be theirs and not often the high salaries or the artistic rewards. Marriage

is their usual lot. After that, housework and the care of children make an end of all opportunity for self-development."

A brisk gleam appeared in Eslanda's intelligent dark eyes. "A woman can organize herself to get an education, too, if she wants," she declared, "and this involves much more than just leaving the child or staying with it, or choosing the husband or the child. It involves the training of the child from infancy. If the mother takes the trouble to plan sensible regular hours for sleeping and eating for the baby from the very beginning, and sticks to them through thick and thin, she will be able to plan her other time and activities as well. If she knows the baby will sleep from training and habit, she will know what time she has free. If a baby is always fed at regular times, its routine is not disturbed if someone else in place of Mama gives him his bottle. When a baby is well trained, has good habits, and is not spoiled, it is very easy to leave someone to keep an eye on him or listen out for him. The same goes for children of all ages.

"Nursery schools nowadays are a great help, but they are much too expensive for the average mother. They should be universal and free, as are our public schools. Babies are just as important as first-graders—maybe more important. There should also be night nurseries, where parents could leave babies and young children for a few hours or a few nights, safely and happily in the knowledge that they would be well cared for by responsible, well-trained people, as is done in the Soviet Union. In Europe it is the custom to leave babies and young children with nurses and governesses if parents can afford them."

"English women leave their children without a qualm," I reminded her.

"Yes, the nannie in England is very much like the mammy in our Deep South. They substitute for the mother to some extent. That is, if the families can afford

them. I think they are a definite mark of class, of social position."

"Can there be such a thing as being too much with one's mother?"

"I'm sure there can be—wear and tear on both child and mother, growing dislike for and irritation with each other because of the wear and tear. Maybe our American children spend too much time with their mothers and not enough time with their fathers."

I had formed ideas on this subject myself, after long observation. There is something more than the normal antagonism between men and women in the United States. There are, among men, too violent extremes of love and dependence upon the mother and dislike of women in general. The American soldier involuntarily cried out for his mother when he was wounded or desolate. This is not true of other soldiers, I am told. Curiously enough, young women in the war when they were wounded or distressed, usually did not think of their mothers. The tie seems to be between sons and mothers. If I had to make a comparison of the men of various countries I would say that American men seem all their lives to be on the defensive against women—as though they expected a woman to criticize or scold, as their mother did, whereas the woman is seldom thinking about such things. Until she is married, at least, she is not critical enough of men, and only too grateful for small attentions. She accepts almost any behavior from men, however careless and rude.

"I get gloomy sometimes," I told Eslanda. "I am getting three boys ready to marry somebody's girls, and I hope the other mothers are preparing these girls for my boys. Though I guarantee nothing! Home is not the only environment the child has. I said to my young son one day, 'What will you do some day when you are married and your wife doesn't like your pajamas on the floor every morning?' To which he answered, 'If she is that fussy, I won't marry her.' Well, why don't parents prepare their

boys and girls to make happier marriages? Or can we?"

Eslanda had listened considerably. Now she said, "The accent here is on getting married, not on staying married and making the marriage a happy and working living. We really should shift our accent. I work very hard at trying to prepare Pauli for a happy and successful marriage. You are absolutely right to make your son pick up his pajamas from the floor. He may marry some well-brought-up girl who just doesn't like to see things lying around, and he would therefore be a constant irritation to her. I make Pauli pick up his things and tidy up after himself. There is no need for a boy to grow up careless and sloppy, just because he is a boy. Carelessness and untidiness can be just as irritating in a boy as in a girl. I don't think Americans think enough and do enough about teaching children, and adults, consideration of others—in small as well as in big matters.

"We expect children to know things, or to learn from example," I said. "They don't learn that way, unfortunately. I have found that parents can be courteous and unselfish toward their children, considerate and kind and all that they hope their children will be, but a child can grow up selfish and rude, for all that."

"I think we must teach them. Of course we have to consider whether we nag them too much in the teaching."

"Do you still try?"

"Yes, I still try, and Pauli is twenty now. I try to teach him about his helping around the house if he has company, about doing errands for me if I'm busy, about reading my manuscripts if he expects me to listen to and follow his work and his sports at school, about tidying up the bathroom after he uses it. The nagging is worth it, sometimes, too. When Pauli was about seven, he spent a week end with a young friend in an English country house. In our home in London we had central heating and constant hot water, which were then luxuries in England. I remember cautioning Pauli about using the hot water

when he went to the country, explaining that most houses had a limited supply and he was not to be greedy. He paid attention and seemed interested, and even remarked that we were lucky to have so much. About a month later I met his friend's mother at a dinner party and she sang out, right across the table, 'How is that adorable boy of yours? We simply loved him.' I was naturally very pleased, and thought, 'Fine, bless him! He behaves well on his own!' The lady went into detail, and said, 'I shall never forget what he said when I was marshaling the children in preparation for dinner. They had been playing tennis and romping in the garden and were rather grubby. Instead of washing up, they seemed to be racing about upstairs, so I called to them and Paul answered. I said, 'Paul, have you had your bath?' 'Yes,' Paul shouted back, 'and I only used a little hot water and washed the tub when I finished.'

"All this may sound very unimportant, but I don't think it is. When people live together there are many adjustments which have to be made. If we can scale down the ordinary daily irritations to a minimum, it is a very great help. Personally I could dislike a man or a woman who leaves faucets running, the top off the toothpaste, closet doors open, and things on the floor."

"Let us get down to the things that wreck a marriage," I suggested. "Most American men have not been trained in these matters as they have been in other countries."

"It's a funny thing that we in America make so much fuss about personal habits before marriage, but not during marriage," Eslanda said. "For instance, body odor, bad breath, dandruff on the collar, carelessness, and inconsiderateness are always stressed during courtships, and almost all the advertisements on these matters are illustrated with young people trying to get married. These things are just as important, even more important, during marriage. And afterward they are more disgusting than before, disgusting and constantly irritating."

"How much good would come from husband and wife discussing these irritating things?" I asked.

"Men are very quick to say 'nag,'" Eslanda replied.

I had made some investigations among American women, and out of this background I said, "Few husbands and wives can discuss together their personal problems. Why can't they discuss personal habits that get on each others' nerves? The husband says the wife is nagging and the wife says 'You don't love me anymore.'"

"In Europe and in Africa they do, and can," Eslanda told me.

"I have not had a single married woman tell me it was not a mistake to discuss with her husband their problems, particularly of sex. Why?"

"Apparently our men are nervous sexually," Eslanda replied. "Why shouldn't they be? They have had no instruction. They just blindly find out the hard way."

This answer explained two things to me, the number of sex crimes in our country, because men who are sexually sure don't commit crimes on weaker people, and also the number of rape cases of our soldiers overseas on people who were weaker. "Do you think it is only lack of instruction that makes our men not sure of themselves?" I asked.

"Lack of instruction, general ignorance, and our stupid abnormal artificial attitude toward sex," Eslanda replied.

"What's the attitude?" I asked.

"That sex is something sacred on the one hand, only for married people, and on the other hand that it is something very low, indecent, and animal. And here we come again right into the contradictions so typical of American life. Actually, sex is a fundamental law of nature like hunger and thirst, and its normal satisfaction should be gratifying and pleasurable. Yet if we find it so, we are considered abnormal somehow. And we glamorize the superficial and wrong aspects of sex. There is the whole tradition of the flowers and the box of candy that a boy takes



## AMERICAN ARGUMENT

to his girl. The boy doesn't go back to the fundamentals of consideration, courtesy, thoughtfulness, manifesting interest. After he has known a girl so long and has taken her out a certain number of times, then he can try to kiss her. They don't seem to know or sense that you can have known a girl ten years or ten minutes and she may or may not want to be kissed at that particular time. 'In the mood' is an expression that is really understood by men and women in sexually adult countries, but American men seem never to take it seriously."

"You must remember that I speak as a person who has not grown up in this country and I ask out of a real desire to know. In other countries there are definite persons whose duty it is to instruct boys and girls in these things. For instance in France and in China—"

"And in Africa! Strange that they don't have any specific sex instruction in England and America. I don't think they have any in Germany, either."

"It is a very serious lack in Western civilization. Why don't American women tell their own sons?" I asked.

"Maybe because they don't know themselves, having never been told."

"Is there a wall of reticence there?" I asked.

"A definite wall. And when some people do discuss sex, the discussion is rarely a useful exchange of constructive information, but rather an exchange of dirty stories. I remember my own ignorance and confusion. I cast about for information, unsuccessfully, and finally I decided to seek out a prostitute, since sex was her business. That was quite a revelation, I can tell you, but I did get some constructive information. The most important thing I learned from her was that there was nothing sacred about sex—it was just an urge like other normal urges, and the sooner I treated it as such, the better off I'd be. So, just as I learned about hunger and thirst and overweight, I learned about sex. Trial and error, research and experimentation!"

The American attitude toward sex is not the only puz-

zling one. Another is the minor matter of what Americans call tattling. In China if two children began to fight, they were told that the right thing to do was to go to the person in charge, the teacher or the parent, to tell him the situation and he would make the decision. If one child did something against the family rules and another child saw it, it would be the child's duty to report it—not to talk about it to the servants but to report it to the proper person. He would be commended for that. This is what I had taught my children to do. One day my little daughter came home and said a certain schoolmate was playing with the DDT sprayer at school and "was spraying me all over my face and Joan all over her face. I told the principal and he said 'If you come tattling to me I won't have you in school.' "

When I told Eslanda this, she said vigorously, "I think the principal is a dope, and very irresponsible for such an important position! A spray full of poison used carelessly could kill children. Here we are again, back at our old American custom of name-calling."

"I am confused as to when it is right for children to tell and not right to tell. Back in my college days, I remember, we had a student government—an honor system—in which I took a great interest and had considerable part, but I could never see how that honor system would work successfully. On the one hand one was honor bound to report violations to the student government but the average student attitude was, 'the other girls will despise me for telling.' "

"Again we come to our contradictions, and our wrong sense of values," Eslanda said. "Obviously, morally, we should be much more concerned about the right thing to do than about what someone will think of us. And invariably, while they insist on no tattling, they will gossip among themselves. I think reporting is not tattling, but is a dignified constructive procedure which takes courage and good sense. The gossip is petty and mean, weak and destructive."

"I see that same contradiction working through everything we do," I added. "Our children think it is all right to deceive the policeman. They have been taught to shield each other from the law. Yet ours is a republic—the laws exist for our benefit. How can we teach respect for law if we won't take responsibility?" I asked Eslanda.

"This question of responsibility is interesting when one looks at other cultures," Eslanda told me. "In African society, for example, men often refuse to become chiefs, and say very frankly they do not want the bother and responsibility that chieftanship entails—they prefer to be ordinary men and let others have the worries. In Western culture, the chief doesn't worry about his responsibilities and obligations; he is much more concerned about his rake-off."

I remembered something. "The young Russian woman with whom I wrote *Talk About Russia*, when I asked her if she were a Communist, said 'No, it is too hard to be a Communist party member. The standards are too high and I don't want to do it.'"

"That's exactly what I mean," Eslanda replied. "That is certainly a contrast to our Western attitude, which is that if you are in a position of power you can and do get many advantages."

"Has the spoils system had its share in making this attitude? A political party gives out the jobs as rewards, not because persons are fitted for the responsibility."

"The government gets away with it because our people as individuals serve themselves, expect and hope to make other people serve them, but seldom bother at all about serving their fellow citizens," Eslanda said with sharpness.

With this environment, if true, how can our children be educated for personal courage and integrity?

## VII

### *Ourselves and The Russians*

WHEN I REVIEWED IN MY MIND ALL THAT ESLANDA and I had said about our country, hers a different one than mine in many ways, as I had come to grant, it seemed to me that while we had touched upon the weaknesses of our people, in ourselves we were some proof of what our country can give its citizens who are willing to make the effort to receive. Both of us are women and yet we have found a way to earn bread and butter and some cake. True, being women, we know that we have not been accorded positions equal to those we would have had as men.

In addition to our being women, Eslanda is a Negro and I am a white. We suffer from these distinctions, she in her way and I in mine. Had I the chance to be born again in the flesh, I would at heart choose not to be born white, because any informed, intelligent, and feeling white person cannot be wholly comfortable as an American. The absurdity of his position prevents sound sleep. The weight of silly prejudice falls upon the white, not upon the Negro. No weight is so heavy as that of guilt. The Negro is in the comfortable position of being sinned against. He can therefore feel free and gay, knowing that he has done no wrong. But I, a white, belonging to an insufferably dominant and domineering race, must shrink to the soul whenever a Negro is lynched in the South. So guilt-ridden am I as a white that I shrink even when a Negro is refused a room at a hotel. I close my eyes when Jim Crow works on

the train—I close my eyes and ask God's forgiveness upon the sinners, who are my own kind. Nay, even more fantastic, I must needs suffer when British and Dutch airplanes bomb the wretched houses of people in the colonies, and this is partly, at least, because the British and Dutch happen to be white, and the people they are killing happen to be dark.

I do not see any guilt in Eslanda's eyes. She has the freedom of soul that comes from a sense of rightness in herself and her people. It is not they who are the world's most hated kind. It is not they who are oppressing others. Eslanda can afford to criticize and to rebel. When I do so, it means a profound self-criticism and a rending of the spirit. It is my own and I who are wrong before the world's peoples. For me all the fair and endearing aspects of my country are darkened by this knowledge.

At any moment of joy and pride I can fall into the abyss of despair. Are not our people kind and good? I have never seen better people, in some ways, than my neighbors, my kinfolk, my townsmen and women, who live upon this piece of earth we call our United States. The germ of true democracy is here. Not all of us have the courage to speak against wrong, but some of us have, enough so that the powers of evil dare not imprison us. Hypocrisy and folly flourish here on a magnificent scale, but they dare not flaunt themselves as such. They must hide behind other names in order to fool the people. Most of the time the people are fooled, but sometimes they are not. We are very far from being in the position of the people in Germany under Hitler. There the gang made no pretense of telling the truth. So arrogant did they grow, as the people sank into abject fear, that men in power lied for the sake of lying, and proclaimed their lies. Nazism became a cult of lies and open evil. This cannot happen here—not yet. The people still rebel—not quickly enough, not bravely enough, but when a few take the lead, some others still dare to follow. In Germany nobody dared to follow such

a lead and those who took it were killed. This cannot happen here—not yet.

Moreover, we Americans, white only less than Negro, have the greatest gift of God to man, a sense of humor. Most Germans were short on this. They were and are an intensely earnest people, and they took themselves seriously. We Americans don't and can't. A little man gets into the White House, and he's just a little man, for a' that. We shall be saved by our laughter one day, perhaps. We could never have kept our faces straight before Hitler. We might have heiled him, but it would have been with a snicker. To us there is something irresistibly funny about a self-important little man with little dark eyes and a little stiff dark moustache. Hitler's efforts at being perfectly dressed and winsome with women would have aroused our most ribald merriment. When a little wolf howls all the big wolves laugh.

I was talking the other day with a famous European, a legal adviser, who when our own militarists went into Germany was invited to stay and advise them. He stayed for two years and then he resigned.

"Your militarists were too much like the German ones," he told me.

This startled me a good deal, although I have no illusions about militarists anywhere. They are the same breed of cats. Still—Americans and Germans?

The man calmed my fears. "Ah, but you Americans have a great weapon against your militarists, and the German people had none. They were helpless but you Americans are not."

"And the weapon?" I inquired.

"Public opinion!" he replied. "Your militarists fear what they call 'adverse publicity.' That means they are still afraid of what people will think of them. If they can make your people worshipful and obedient, then they will do as they like. But if your people are watchful and critical the militarists cannot do as they like. Alas, in Germany,

the people never dared to speak, and so the militarists had their way—militarists, politicians, big business worked together, and the people knew but they dared not speak. Keep your weapon clean and drawn, you Americans!”

What keeps our weapon clean and drawn is our sense of humor. Even a general cannot win against laughter, especially if it has the ring of steel in it.

I am glad I am an American. I might enjoy life more as a Negro, but one is born with one's skin fixed. I try to forget it as much as I can. Elsewhere I can forget it entirely but here in my own country, by means of segregation and discrimination, they keep rubbing it in that I am a white. Yet I am not inclined to be as critical of our country and our people as Eslanda is. I have to agree with her criticisms because in the main they are true, and she has more right to make them than I have. But I keep remembering the goodness I have found here in individuals, the ready response of persons upon whom I have called for help when something right needed to be done and I could not do it alone. All over our vast country there are people whose faces I have never seen who respond upon call when something has to be done. This quick and generous response balances, for me, the frightful and callous greed that I find here, too. But extremes are in every land. The rich in China can be glad when famine strikes the poor—a cure for overpopulation, they say. In India while the villages bake in the sun and starve in drought the rich take their pleasures at fabulous cost to the people. For it is always the people who pay, whether in the United States or India. It is dangerous to talk about the people these days because it sounds Communist, I am told. Nevertheless the people are everywhere and it is true that they are the ones who suffer and pay, whether in the Soviet Union or in the United States.

Do I want my people different? Not basically! I like Americans as they are. Being imperfect myself, I would not know how to live among perfect people. They are

good at heart and not more stupid than the common run of folk elsewhere. Neither are they wiser. Their instincts are toward the right, and they can occasionally be angry at the wrong. There are only one or two ways in which I want them improved. I would like them to know more. They are badly educated and they have no means, at present, of getting a better education, and out of ignorance they do foolish things and allow foolish things to be done in their name. With ignorance cured, most of their faults would go—most of them, except perhaps one, the cure for which I do not know. We Americans are a hardhearted people. Mingled with sudden generousities toward those who suffer in some disaster, and this generosity can be shown to total strangers provided they are in some country which for the moment we favor, we are generous without the ability to be merciful in the small and tender ways of human intercourse. Our callousness toward children and old people is only one example of what I mean. We subscribe to large organized charities readily in order to relieve ourselves of the personal efforts which the small and tender ways demand of us. We dislike beggars and so beggars are put off the street. It is a disgrace to have any of our people starve, and so starvation is hidden if not prevented.

I say we are hardhearted because I first became aware of it in myself. In China there are few organized charities, and beggars roam the streets most miserably and sometimes die. Begging is a profession there, and those who give to beggars give as our rich men set up foundations, in order to gain glory and set some good to their account. Orthodox religious persons, too, will give to beggars for the same reason. Yet it is not the charity of the rich of which I speak. It is tenderheartedness, which is a very different thing. Tenderheartedness is a Chinese trait. To be tenderhearted to children and to the old, to relatives and especially to friends, makes pleasant atmosphere. To be courteous to strangers is part of that tenderheartedness,



and so is it to refrain from openly pushing one's own advantage. A genuine and surprisingly universal practice of the Chinese golden rule, "Do not unto others that which you would not have done unto you," has created a sensitivity in most Chinese which makes for civilized life, for it produces, inevitably, an imaginative attitude toward others, a putting oneself in the other's place and acting accordingly.

In this atmosphere I was reared and this precept I was taught. Now, to my chagrin, I discover that the different atmosphere of my own country is changing my own heart. I have sometimes actually to remind myself of that which is really natural to me. I find that the selfish toughness of those around me is compelling a similar toughness in me toward others, and I do not like it. It is true, as I have said before, that I can call upon persons whose faces I have not seen and again they come to help in some good work. But it is even more true that for one such person there are a thousand who are indifferent to any good work and to any suffering in others. The order would be reversed in China, if only for courtesy's sake. No Chinese would answer as did a wealthy and well-known American not long ago, "I give my money only where I can get something out of it."

Perhaps that puts into a nutshell the American attitude—give, yes, but only where one can get something back in public notices, in social opportunity, in business advantage. It is an attitude new to me and very hardening to the heart. Perhaps the Chinese gets something back too, but if he does, it is not so blatantly expressed. It is contained in the gentler ways of quiet self-satisfaction.

This combination of ignorance, selfishness, and political folly has led us to the moment at which we now are, at the brink of a third war. Unless something new happens to prevent it, war was and is the inevitable result of the attitude taken by the United States at the San Francisco Conference. That was when we revealed ourselves at our worst

to the hopeful, waiting, suffering world. The tragedy is that we did not know what we did. Most Americans still do not know, for now our propaganda is welling up and we are being all but drowned in this, our own vomit.

What happened at the San Francisco Conference? It was just after the war. All the world's peoples—not the politicians and the militarists and the big money-makers, but the peoples—were looking to the United States. They were not looking for any of the filthy charity which we imagine other people always want of us. No, they were looking for a statement for humanity. The peoples used to know us by Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln and a few other such Americans. They took it for granted that these were the leaders of our national life and thought. Our Constitution and the Bill of Rights were known around the world. Men hidden in caves and villages in countries ridden by tyrants memorized these documents in order to strengthen their own spirits.

The war was ended and the tyrants had been driven from Germany and Japan and the countries they had seized. The whole world was at a high point when the delegates came to the conference at San Francisco. They looked to America for the men to speak the words which could crystallize the hour and set the face of the world toward the sun. What words? Just the words whereby men and women have always lived—words of faith in human freedom and equality, of hope for brotherhood and for a world point of view.

We Americans do not know the world or understand its peoples. We did not even know that for one brief hour the peoples looked to us with hope and even adoration. We could have had our way with them, provided it was a way that would engage the highest in human spirit. By the power of our moral attractiveness we could have cowed even the nationalism of Soviet Russia and the crassness of communism. But we were so ignorant that we did not know our own power. We sent little men to San Francisco

and they spoke small selfish words. The shock of disappointment shook the hearts of all peoples. Only the gangsters of the nations rejoiced. The peoples' disappointment mounted into grief and then into despair. The worldwide apathy that has lasted, that exists until now, is the result of the shock of discovering that America was not ready for the moral leadership which alone could have won the world to her side and saved the future.

The silence of the peoples has been terrifying. This world silence has roused unease in our own people—this silence, both at home and abroad, broken only by the raucous voices of little men shouting their curses at each other across Europe. The people do not feel. They do not care. "Why are our people so apathetic?" the leaders inquire with rage. They are wrong. The people are not apathetic. There never was a time when the American people and all other peoples were so profoundly moved and stirred and bewildered as they are now. In every country the people are huddled together, taking counsel of themselves and their own hearts. There are too few great men to lead them and they know it. Therefore they must find leadership in the mass and in themselves, as they have done before.

Throughout human history there have been such times when the peoples, perceiving no great men, turn to themselves. What happens then is revolutionary. The history of revolutions is a revealing one. Most revolutions have been failures. The American Revolutionary War was not a real revolution. It was a war for independence. The Civil War was more nearly a real revolution. Yet it was not successful. All its main issues remain unsettled. While slavery was abolished in one sense, it has never been abolished in another. It is no longer legal for a white man to own Negroes as he owns his horses and cows, but practically he can control them in the same way. They are still dependent upon his whims and his prejudices. The white man cannot sell Negroes, but neither is he under the necessity

of feeding and clothing them. Practically the white man has gained—he can dismiss a Negro without fear of financial loss. When he owned the Negro he had to protect his financial investment by seeing that the slave did not die too soon. We Americans are still in the process of a blind sort of revolution. We do not know what is happening to us, but changes are going on and we are resisting them. These changes are taking place because human despair forces them. Those who are callous to the despair of the people are the resisters.

Revolution of some sort or another is taking place in almost every country in the world, and the reason for this is that there is no world leadership. Our country cannot now provide leadership however much money we have and in spite of the atomic bomb, because real leadership has to be spiritual. People, even quite stupid ones, will follow a leader only when he provides food for the body combined with hope for the spirit. He can manage even without the food for a while if he can provide hope for the spirit, but food without hope will not make him a leader. This is why in every country the people are turning to themselves.

Since this has happened before, one might read history and remain calm. England has had revolutions, but she has always righted herself and gone on. France had a mighty revolution and many were killed, but in the usual vacuum after such revolutions the gains were well nigh lost. Peoples have risen to frightful strength but they did not know what to do after the storm was over. Then they were at the mercy of those whom they themselves had raised high, and the chances were that in their ignorance they allowed bad men to deceive them. Golden calves have been set up, while the man of God lingered on the mountaintops. The people heretofore have had no pattern for their revolutions. The storms have passed.

The danger is now that a pattern has been provided.

Today when people speak of revolution they think of communism. The modern pattern is ready made.

Nobody knows, thanks to Soviet isolationism, how successful the Russian people think the new pattern is. Discontented folk elsewhere are therefore at the mercy of propaganda, and since in large areas of the earth people are in such despair that they welcome any change, they may believe what they hear. Moreover, Soviet Russia is increasing in strength and prosperity and, thanks largely to the political folly of other nations, chiefly our own, she is moving into the vacuums left by departing rulers.

I had so far avoided Soviet Russia in my talks with Eslanda. She is not a Communist. I would not have wanted to spend hours with her had she been one, for every Communist I have ever met in any country has been a simple person whose thinking was fairly stereotyped.\* Meet one

*\* Note by E. G. R.—It is surprising, interesting, and very revealing that Pearl believes she “would not have wanted to spend hours” with me, if I were a Communist. Here am I, Eslanda Cardozo Goode Robeson, a human being whom she likes, respects, and trusts. No matter what anyone may say or believe about me, I am nevertheless still the same Eslanda. And now here is Pearl, an intelligent, experienced, sympathetic, wholly superior human being, and she says she would have slammed a door between us if she had believed I was a Communist—whether I was or not! This kind of prejudice which we Americans have been taught staggers me at every point; it crops up in unexpected places in the most unlikely people; it proves what a thorough job has been done by the propagandists on many different levels. If Americans continue to slam doors around them, against their fellow men of different color, religions, economic and political beliefs, national origin, station in life—why then, very soon indeed, they will find themselves all by themselves in a badly ventilated room (because they have slammed the doors); there they will*

and you have met them all, allowing for straight hair or curly, hooked noses or pugs! Eslanda is not a simple person, but she is direct and intensely practical, and the directness and practicality of life as she saw it under favorable circumstances in Soviet Russia attracted her. After all, the Russians are now primarily of peasant stock. They have killed off their intellectuals and their nobility. Peasants are everywhere direct and practical. Moreover, it would be less than human had not Eslanda enjoyed the honor and respect paid her husband and herself in Soviet Russia. She found it quite true that there was no prejudice against them there as Negroes. It is equally true that this prejudice exists in only a few places in the world, and notably only in the United States, South Africa, and Australia.

"Let's face Russia," I said one morning. "I saw it years ago, long before the revolution. It was very obvious then, even to me as just a young girl, that a tremendous blow-up was coming. Some sort of blow-up is inevitable, I'm afraid, in China, and the money we are pouring in will all be wasted."

"As is all the money we are pouring into Greece, into  
*first become lonesome and sick, and will finally disintegrate.*

*Note by P.S.B.—Had you been a Communist, Eslanda, I would not have slammed a door between us. I close no door between any human being and myself. But I would not have chosen to write this book with you. There are religious, political, military, even economic systems which do change the personality. Were you a Communist, you would not be the same person I know as Eslanda. Were you the devotee of a possessive church, were you absorbed in selfish devotion to money-making, were you subject to a military machine, you would be changed. When the self is yielded up to a creed or a cause or a system, the personality changes. It is no longer free.*

## AMERICAN ARGUMENT

Italy, and into Europe generally," Eslanda retorted. "It's all right to pour money into feeding hungry people, and into building an economy so that they will be able to feed and clothe themselves. But to pour money into armies, into the military, means helping to keep wars going. What can be constructive about that? Armies don't feed people or build economies."

"People want a standard," I suggested.

"They want a standard they set up for themselves, not one that is forced on them, or even wished on them. Whatever it is they want, we know they don't want war," she replied.

"I wish I knew how the people of Soviet Russia really feel," I said. "Can they be satisfied with the sort of men who represent them over here and in the United Nations? But then, are we satisfied with our representatives? Karl Marx gave a blueprint for modern revolution, but I wonder if it has worked? I wonder if the Russian people are really better off under their new rulers?"

"I'm not as up on Marx as I should be," Eslanda said frankly. "I do know that the people in Russia came to their last standing place, driven there by oppression by the Czars and the corrupt nobility. When you come to your last standing place, you have to turn around and say, *No. This is it!* People do that everywhere. You and I do it. The people in France did it in their time. We did it here in America when we were a colony. People are doing it now in Asia, in Palestine, in Europe."

I agreed to this somewhat sadly. I do not believe in revolutions. Were there sufficient enlightenment, their wild wastefulness could always be avoided. But people live, careless and unthinking, and oppressions and injustices creep up on them from the greedy and clever few who always count upon people being careless and unthinking. The danger of tyranny is greater now than ever because modern weapons are absolute in power, and holding them

in his possession even a small man can become an absolute tyrant.

There is a sort of pathos in revolutions, behind the danger. They rise out of people's despair, they mount on people's hope. The first leaders are nearly always good, if mistaken, men. Most revolutions rise to their height under the leadership of intellectuals. These intellectuals are usually genuinely moved by the plight of the people. They soon come to understand, however, that if the revolution is to make any gains for the people it must be organized. Therefore they set up an organization. In the emergencies, those who do not obey its rules are destroyed. It is easy to step from being a leader of a people's revolution to being a new tyrant of the people. Intellectuals do not really belong to the people. They are functioning, individualistic minds. They can destroy the very freedoms which they set out to build.

When I think of these intellectuals, zealous for the welfare of the people, I am reminded of English sheep dogs. These brisk and intelligent beasts learn to keep the sheep within the organization of the herd. But sheep, like people, tend to wander, and the dog, in his determination to keep his charges together and all going in the same direction, first barks at the wanderers who will not stay organized. For a time this suffices as warning, then the sheep learn that barking does not hurt them and so they no longer heed it. Now the dog, under his solemn sense of responsibility for the herd, starts to nip the rebellious sheep. This again works for a while, but only until the rebel sheep realize that a nip does not kill them. They wander again. In the frenzy of his self-importance, the dog begins to kill the wanderers—all for the good of the herd, of course! Only those who conform will he allow to live. I have never seen sheep turn on the dog—it would be a heartening sight.

I tried to use this playful metaphor with Eslanda in regard to the Russian Revolution but she shook her head.



## AMERICAN ARGUMENT

"I don't quite follow you," she said. "As I understand it, what the Bolsheviks did in building the new order in the Soviet Union was to remove the people who not only refused to work with the government, but who worked actively against it."

"There will always be people to work against anything," I suggested. "If only those in opposition could have been made to come into the pattern, but they, like sheep—"

"Then everything would have been much easier," she broke in. "Being realistic and practical, the Bolsheviks knew that they would need the intellectuals, would need their knowledge and training and skills and experience, to help carry out the program of mass education and raising the general standard of living. The Bolsheviks tried to convert their opponents, even the kulaks. Having failed to convert them, they tried to persuade them to co-operate. Again failing, they tried to force them. When they not only would not co-operate, but deliberately worked against the government, they were 'removed.' If the government was to survive, it had to remove them."

"Just like the sheep dog," I said.

I myself have learned to dislike what is commonly called an intellectual, from my years in China. There the intellectual has traditionally been an arrogant separatist, too good, in his own opinion, to share the life and work of the people. Corrupt Chinese governments have always been stuffed with intellectuals. Nevertheless, I do not believe in what is called liquidation; I do not believe in it for anybody. I would like to leave alive even people I dislike, if for no other reason than that dislike is usually mutual and I feel safer myself if liquidating is not the commonly accepted method of getting rid of dissenters.

"I'm not so afraid of liquidation as you are," Eslanda retorted. "I regret it, of course. I would avoid it if I possibly could. I like dogs, but I certainly wouldn't hesitate one moment to liquidate a mad dog. It's discouraging, but sometimes a few people behave like mad dogs—the people

who lynch Negroes in the South, the people who exploited Africans to the death, the people who foment wars, the people who cause millions of other people to starve to death in famines, or to live out their lives as serfs. These are mad dogs, and must be treated as such."

I was silent here. Eslanda and I can be very far apart sometimes. The real argument, in my mind, against "liquidation" is the effect on the liquidators. To feel that we are justified in killing those with whom we disagree or who oppose us, for any reason, hardens the human heart to a degree dangerous to all human beings. After all, a mad dog is a dog, not a human being. I have always been opposed to what is called "mercy killing." Granted that the sick or imbecile person is better dead, for his own sake, yet for society it is better that he be kept alive even as a burden. For the greatest danger to society is the hard heart, the attitude that declares that some should die in order that others may live more comfortably. Certainly I agree with you, Eslanda, that there should not be oppressors and tyrants. But we can deal with them in other ways than by death. The Hitler type is in individuals, and individuals can be controlled. I believe that people should always be on the watch for the potential tyrant. Teachers should detect him in the school bully, and citizens should detect him in the boss politician, the ruthless businessman, the gangster. He should be detected, corrected if possible, but certainly controlled. He cannot rise alone to power. Others lift him.

My argument is that for the sake of all human beings we cannot accept the principle of liquidation. The taste of blood is still too dangerous.

Eslanda went on, "In a way, although I certainly do not sympathize with them, I can understand how the intellectuals felt. Here they were, taught to believe they were super people, and elite, far above what they considered the low level of the common dumb animal peasant. Now they were to share their elegant learning and skills with the

common herd, which would make them common, too, so they thought. Some of them just couldn't take it. They couldn't see that they would not be lowered; on the contrary, they would be raising the level of the mass of the people by making a constructive contribution. Surely this would also be raising their own high level higher, by being useful instead of, shall we say, merely ornamental? But they couldn't or wouldn't see that.

"I feel this is a dangerous weakness in some intellectuals everywhere, and I have found this superiority complex of theirs very offensive. They all too often look down upon the uneducated masses as ignorant, stupid, inferior. And this is ridiculous, because, in the last analysis, the only difference between the educated and the uneducated is that the educated have been fortunate enough to achieve an education."

I perceived that Eslanda and I were talking about two kinds of intellectuals, the salvationist or sheep dog variety, who want to organize the people, and the fancy ones who don't think the people are worth anything anyway and who live for each other.

I tried to make the distinction clear. To my efforts, Eslanda responded thus:

"I have never liked fancy intellectuals anywhere. I believe knowledge should be shared. And I believe that all knowledge can be reduced to clear words of one syllable, which can be understood by simple people. I believe a great teacher, or even a good teacher, can explain the fundamentals of the most profound and abstruse ideas to a child. As a scientist myself, I disdain the impressive technical terms and the sixty-four-dollar words and the swank double talk." Eslanda paused here to let her eyes sparkle with inner laughter. "It could be that I am prejudiced against intellectuals!"

"When were you in Russia?" I asked.

"First in 1935, then off and on until 1939, altogether about two years."

"Do you think the war has changed Russia?" I asked.

"Of course. But I don't think it has changed Russia as much as it has changed America."

"But you haven't been there since the war," I suggested.

"No, but we keep in touch with the Russians we know here, and with our American friends who visit Russia."

"For myself, I believe that every country is always changed by war," I said. "I, myself, am one of these people who fear communism, at least in practice as I have seen it, because it demands that one give up too much of his individual freedom. That terrifies me."

"If you fear communism, that's all right," Eslanda said calmly. "Nobody says you have to have it. The Russians seem to like it, and they have it, so why should you worry about their individual freedom? It's theirs, and they are doing what they want to about it. As a matter of fact, this is the very thing that appeals to me. The Russians seem to have grown up to the point where they realize that in a modern world, one has to surrender some of one's individuality in order to secure a maximum of it for themselves, and for everybody else.

"I notice the people who keep talking about the sacredness of individual freedom have quite a lot of it themselves. They are the 'haves,' the people who either have what they want already, or expect to be able to achieve it in the reasonable future. So they naturally don't want any changes made, thank you!"

To this I could say nothing. Yes, I suppose in most ways I am one of the "haves."

"Here in America," Eslanda was saying, "the sharecroppers, the migrant workers, 'ill-housed, ill-fed, ill-clad,' and the minorities, don't have much of this sacred individualism. There is always the question of whose individualism one is preserving, one's own personal exclusive individualism or individualism for everyone. That's the point to consider.

"Anyway, I've always thought that outsiders make much

more of communism than the Soviets do inside Russia. The Soviets look to communism as a goal in the future, and they are living their working state socialism now. And socialism is not at all revolutionary these days, except to frantic Americans."

"I am taking the point of view of the average American now," I told Eslanda. "There it is—if we are all wrong about Soviet Russia, why don't they do something to let us know it?"

To this Eslanda replied, "Americans have already had their minds made up for them about the Russians and about the Soviet system. So no matter what they say, no matter what they do, we won't listen. I know about this kind of thing from bitter experience with some of my own countrymen. White Americans have already had their minds made up for them about the Negro, and no matter what evidence we offer—scientific, statistical, factual—they turn a deaf and prejudiced ear, and refuse to listen and to be convinced by facts. Even when progressive white Americans offer incontrovertible evidence on our behalf, the majority of their countrymen will not listen. Their minds have already been made up for them against us.

"The Russians have tried and tried to 'do something' about our misconceptions, all to no avail, or very little avail. As Stalin said to Stassen last year, 'Every time we have given freedom of the press to your correspondents, we have lived to regret it.' American reporters, with characteristic contradiction, insist that there is an 'iron curtain' on the one hand, yet pour out news about forced labor, prison camps, and ruthless dictatorship on the other hand. They can penetrate the 'curtain' for bad news, it seems!

"What interests me particularly about the Soviet system is the fact that they set mass literacy as one of their goals and have achieved it, and this is literacy in the ordinary sense in addition to political literacy. It is practically impossible to find a Soviet citizen, even in remote areas, who does not understand, in general, the fundamentals of his

government. Americans speak derisively of this political literacy of the Soviet citizen as 'indoctrination.' Well, I don't care what you call it—I think it is a good thing. We Americans are politically illiterate. The strength of the Soviet people is that they have been taught to read and write and to think politically, so now they know the score, and can and do help keep score for themselves. Millions of Soviet citizens can and do say, 'This is the way we want our way of life, and we will make it like this.' So I believe that Soviet leaders, even if they wanted to be tyrannical, could only go so far and no further with their literate people."

I broke in. "I cannot contradict you, for I have no personal knowledge of Soviet Russia. I know I would not enjoy living under communism for I am so individualistic that I want my own possessions, from my own toothbrush to my own farm. I read books written by people who hate Soviet Russia and others by people who love it, and I don't know any more than I did before, except that evidently people don't like the same things. I can understand that much."

"There is a great deal Americans do not know about the Soviet way of life, and they will not listen when one tries to tell them about it," Eslanda retorted. "As a Negro I understand this for as I told you, there is a great deal white Americans do not know about Negroes, and they will not listen when we try to tell them. They prefer their prejudices. They are similarly prejudiced against the Soviet Union."

I said, "But the answer to that is, frankly, that I'd have to see for myself. Yet even if I were allowed to go to Soviet Russia, I can't speak the language, and I don't trust guides in any country. I'd have to bungle about by myself—but I'd have to be able to understand what was said to me—if people are allowed to speak to a foreigner over there."

"Pearl, there are short cuts to language, so if you are ever invited to go, don't let that hold you back! I went all

over Africa without understanding a word of the various dialects, but I was able to learn a lot, and I certainly was able to see and to sense a lot. Of course language is a very useful equipment, but I think a really sympathetic interest and attitude are even more useful equipment for a journey in Russia today. You and I ought to be able to understand these conflicting reports we get in books. We have both had a lot of experience with reporters. We know that reporters bring their own points of view to the interviews and stories—interpret what they see and hear according to their own interests, prejudices, and points of view. Sometimes they are so intent upon their own ideas that they miss completely the ideas offered to them. But even if they are objective and honest, as some certainly are, their papers may cut or distort their reports in the printing.”

“But why are we so afraid of Communists?”

“Are we really afraid of them, or have we been told day after day to be sure to be afraid of them?” she asked. “Our leaders fear them. But then leaders are entrenched in a good position, and they always fear something new, something different. It may be that people are always afraid of something new that is entirely different from what they have always known. After spending generation after generation with one sense of values, they are afraid to look at, and to consider, a new and wholly different evaluation. At any rate, I believe that the average American doesn’t know enough about the Soviet Union to fear it. Our government fears it and has spread that fear to the people.”

“I find many Americans who feel that while the Russian form of government is totally unlike our own, let them have it. We don’t want it, however, for ourselves,” I said.

“That would be fine,” Eslanda replied. “Live and let live! Whatever the Russian form of government is, it is what the Russians want; if it isn’t, that is their business, and they themselves must and will change it, not outsiders. Whatever our form of government is, it should be what we want, or we should try to change it ourselves, not out-

siders. But that is not what we are doing. We are not minding our own business. We are not living and letting live. We are very busy indeed trying to sell our way of life to countries all over the world; we are trying to wish it on them by diplomatic, economic, and now, military interference. I don't believe we can do it, and for a very simple reason: because our way of life doesn't even work for us."

"In Russia they have only one party," I reminded her.

"Americans are always worrying about the one-party system in Russia," she retorted, "but they don't worry too much about our own celebrated two parties, which act as one on many important issues, and which have a fit when a third party is suggested."

"I am born of dissenting stock," I said, "not fond of being governed overmuch anywhere, and I have been educated among the Chinese people who believe that rulers are evil when they cannot keep the price of rice low enough for the people to eat all they want. Indeed, when the price of rice rises, people in China feel it is time for the government to change. I wish we could all have governments that understood that their sole duty is to see that people must have enough to eat, that law and order are preserved, and that industry is developed."

Eslanda rejected what seemed to her a utopian idea. "I don't see how you can achieve that without some kind of politics."

I was reluctant to believe that the idea was impractical. To me it is simply a different view of government responsibility. I contend that a government might say, "We have no interest in politics whatever. Let people believe what they want. Our business as a government is to see that criminals don't impose on society, that there is no starvation, that there are enough houses, that children get education, that people are allowed to say what they want to say, that newspapers can print what they like. Our whole effort will be to get these affairs accomplished."

"Sounds too easy!" Eslanda declared. "You need a cer-



## AMERICAN ARGUMENT

tain amount of organization to accomplish this, and organization always seems to involve some politics. Maybe it would be possible to reduce the politics to a minimum. It's at a maximum now."

"What if a party came out with just that platform?" I urged.

"Here in America people would be suspicious," she replied. "Politicians and government have made us very skeptical of platforms and promises."

"Why are we such an impractical people?" I asked. "We are very impractical. We don't test a government by achievement."

"And that is our fault, so we deserve what we get!" Eslanda said swiftly. "We don't bother to make our government work the way we want it to work, and then we become distrustful of it. The government in Russia seems to have enlisted the active co-operation of the people in its workings, and so the people understand and trust it. Could be!"

Eslanda and I had not made the least headway with each other about Soviet Russia. I respect her right to her own opinion, and certainly she has the advantage over me in having been there. But my doubts remained unresolved. Even as my America was not hers, as she had often reminded me, her Russia might not be mine. We are conditioned, as Americans. All that I can maintain is that we allow each other the right to differ. Positive and strong as Eslanda is, she is as American as I am, and we keep our freedom of opinion. If ever my doubts are cleared away, I shall tell her immediately. If she ever sees that Russia may not be the Russia she thinks it is, she will tell me so. We are both honest.

Nevertheless, after long reflection over what we had said, I returned to what is, for me, familiar and firm ground. I believe, always, that good ends can only be reached by good means. Any means that violates the prin-

ciple of justice to the human individual destroys the end of the highest good for all. Therefore I cannot believe that a regime which has established itself and maintains itself by the elimination of those who oppose it can be a regime good even for those who uphold it. There must be room for the opposition. It takes time to suit the noble means to the noble end, but it is the only way to guarantee that end.

## VIII

### *Ourselves and Freedom*

I REFLECTED LONG INDEED OVER WHAT ESLANDA had said of the Soviet Union. To me it was important not because it was about that country but because she had said it. It was revealing not of Russia but of an American citizen. She is much too sensible to fall before propaganda.

I pondered longest over what she had said about freedom. I have never been willing to give up the slightest iota of personal freedom. I must grant that I was born an American, a white American, and as Eslanda reminds me often, I have been nurtured in freedom by being reared in China. Individualism in China has been carried to such an extent through the centuries that it has become the very atmosphere of the country, even more rampant there than here. I remember when the first trains were put through the province of Kiangsu where I grew up. The rolling stock was, I think, bought from the United States. At any rate, there were signs against spitting on the floors and these signs had been translated into Chinese. When Chinese gentlemen, long used to spitting where they pleased, read the signs they were in a fine frenzy. What—tell them where not to spit? They continued to spit on the floors. Who were these railroad tyrants? And Sun Yat-sen, that brave sheepdog of a revolutionist, tore his hair often over the individualism of his fellow citizens who, he declared, could no more be organized than “a tray of loose sand!”

I have tried not to be selfish in my convictions about freedom. I have always wanted everybody to have the freedom I enjoy and have spent much effort in trying to make this come true. While I realize that a certain amount of yielding is necessary in order to allow freedom for all and that individuals so insistent upon their own freedoms that they curtail the freedom of others must be checked even in a democracy, yet I believe that it is better to have too much freedom than too little. Some one suffers, either way. It is easier to check excessive freedom than it is to get back lost freedom.

Yet here was Eslanda, as American as I, with a point of view on freedom different from my own. I reminded myself that she had never enjoyed all my freedoms. Moreover, being an unselfish and imaginative woman, she has felt as her own the lack of freedom in which so many Americans must live. It was important, therefore, that I understand her point of view, for it must be that of millions of our fellow citizens.

Another thing troubled me. How much loyalty can be demanded of citizens to a government which does not fulfill its promises to them? What about the many persons in the United States who have miserable lives, little liberty, and less chance for the pursuit of happiness? Must such persons maintain their loyalty to a defaulting government?

I put these two questions frankly to Eslanda when next we met.

"Let's take freedom first," she said. "I'm getting mighty tired of all our loose talk about freedom. Freedom is an important and precious word, and we use it much too carelessly. It could be that my idea of freedom is different and special and wholly personal. Anyway, I can only discuss the word and the idea from my own point of view."

"That is what I want you to do," I told her.

"To me," she said, "freedom means security—mental, emotional, social, and physical security. I know that when

I can think, feel, behave the way I want to, without fear of being hurt, insulted, punished, I feel wholly free.

"Being a reasonable person—I hope!—I know I can't achieve that kind of freedom without making definite concessions to the society I live in. But the only kind of concessions I'm willing to make are those that will prevent me, or anyone, from interfering with the similar freedom of anybody else. Maybe I should say of the majority of other people! I accept the fact that I must, to some extent, control my thinking, feeling, and behavior. Specifically, if I get angry I know I just can't hit people or kill them. If I feel a strong sex urge, I know I just can't go out and sleep with anybody; if I want to dress differently from the current fashion, I know that I shall be thought odd and eccentric. And that is all right with me. My freedom lies in the fact that *I* can decide how much of my personal sovereignty I want to surrender, in order to get along with my society.

"I know I have no freedom at all if somebody else insists upon and succeeds in making me think in a certain way, feel in a certain way, talk in a certain way, live in a certain place, and do certain things—not for the good of the whole society, but for some few special peoples' benefit and profit, or shall we say, for no socially constructive reason, but just because they say so. I know I am not only not free at all, but that I am being persecuted, if all or any of these certain applications are made to me, merely because I am a member of a special group.

"I am willing and eager to surrender as much of my personal sovereignty as is necessary, in order to secure as much freedom as possible, not only for myself, but for all the members of the society. And here is the important thing—I know I cannot have any real freedom all by myself. I can't have it unless everybody has it.

"I don't think freedom exists per se. You have to consider it in a definite context. As Negroes say, 'How high is up?' just so you have to consider, 'How free is free?' For in-

stance, during peacetime everybody can take cameras all over the place; in wartime they can't. During fair weather the roads are open to everybody, during blizzards they are not. During normal times we can eat as we please, during war and postwar times we have to ration ourselves. And so it goes. We give up some of our personal sovereignty for the good of society as a whole. And that means, of course, for our own good."

This seemed to me an entirely satisfactory answer on the question of what freedom means for the citizens of a democracy. I thought it particularly wise of Eslanda to say that for her the crux of freedom was in the fact that she could choose how much of her personal sovereignty she wished to surrender in order to get along with the society to which she belonged. That expresses to a nicety the exact point at which personal individual freedom crosses with the freedom of others. If governments of sovereign states could be as wise as this, there would be no more war. Nor is it a matter of appeasement—it is entirely a question of balance. One balances peace and sensible social benefits against the reckless individualism which, in the case of the single human being, brings to him pain and suffering through the disapproval and ostracism of his fellows. In the case of nations, which are only human beings in aggregate, the frightful punishment is war.

I put the next question. "Now what about loyalty to one's country? Let us take as an example women, because we are a submerged group. American women have many privileges, but they don't have full rights—we all know that. The only person having full rights in the United States is a white, gentile, Protestant, adult male—and we have to except even the poor white male in the poll-tax South. One can see how this white, gentile, Protestant, adult male, not in the poll-tax South, could be entirely loyal as a citizen, but what about the rest of us?"

"And the rest of us are a lot of millions," Eslanda retorted. "Well, in the first place, I don't think such people

as the Thomas Committee are talking about loyalty at all. That is, they are talking about it, but they don't mean it. And here we are again, typically American—talking about one thing and meaning another! What they are actually talking about, and meaning, is not loyalty, but disagreement with their point of view. These victims of the 'loyalty purge' are being persecuted for their political opinions. Only colossal nerve could call it disloyalty to the country."

"But our government, of course, believes it is disloyalty," I said.

"But does it? I doubt it!" she replied. "I don't think they are as stupid as all that. They are deliberately calling this political purge a 'loyalty' purge, so they can get away with it. They know if they call it by its right name, the American people might not support it. In all fairness, maybe the people are not supporting it now, but they are not doing enough to stop it, and, as Shakespeare would say, 'that's a fault.'

"This loyalty business is very like another custom we have. When some grown-ups want to get away with something with children, they talk a lot about 'respect.' 'You must respect your elders,' they insist. This has always struck me as silly, and I was delighted when Pauli rejected the idea and protested to an adult when he was very young. 'Respect, respect!' he said impatiently. 'You can't just demand respect—respect *happens*! I can't respect you just because you are grown-up. Everybody grows up, bad people, too. I will respect you if you deserve respect. You won't have to *tell* me—I'll know!' Well, loyalty is like respect. No one has to tell you to be loyal. You can't make laws about loyalty. Loyalty *happens*, it is merited, it is earned.

"So this loyalty purge strikes me as very phony. So far as our laws are concerned, any citizen is well within his constitutional rights when he expresses freedom of political opinion. If our Bill of Rights is to stand up, a citizen may not only disagree with current political behavior and

power, but he may say so in public and in private. But our current government ignores our Constitution and Bill of Rights and says, "This year, we will put you in jail if you disagree with us." "

She paused here, and her eyes blazed. She said, "No, I am wrong when I say they ignore our Constitution and Bill of Rights. Heavens, no! with staggering impertinence they mounted these sacred documents, and others, magnificently, on a Freedom Train, and sent it across the country to be looked at!"

"But why should we be as we are?" I asked with sorrow.

"It's our celebrated way of life. We have been brought up like this."

"By whom?"

"By many insincere political leaders—demagogues, all!"

"You think our government is demagogic?" I demanded.

"Yes, ma'am, I do! When you come right down to it, we are being ruled by the Southern reactionaries. When there is doubt in Congress, the Southerners decide—'for' if their support is enlisted and paid for in kind by the Northerners, or 'against', if they don't want to play along. The filibuster is a notorious example of their successful tactics 'against'."

"Eslanda, are you saying that the North did not win the Civil War?"

"Pearl, that's just what I'm saying!"

"The North lost the Civil War?"

"Yes!"

"In what way did the South win the Civil War?"

"They won the ideological war, although they lost the military war. We all know now that the military phase is only part of a war. If you doubt that the South won the Civil War, just cast your mind over these facts: It was said the war was fought to free the Negro; have a look now, and see if you think he is free in the South? Or even in the North! No, he isn't. It was said the war was fought to enforce the priority of federal over states' rights; have a



look now and see if you think the Southerners respect federal authority? No, they flaunt it, ignore it, override it, in practice and in their state laws. And further, has the North been able to influence the South toward a more democratic state of mind? No, no! On the contrary, the South has been able to spread its own undemocratic attitudes and behavior further and further north. Just have a look at Washington, the capital of our nation! And the North has taken more and more of its industry South, in order to benefit from cheap labor there and the generally low standard of living."

I cannot agree entirely with Eslanda here. For the sake of accuracy, perhaps, it must be said that the North won the war industrially and that the Union, at least technically, was preserved. While there is disunity enough and the word "secession" might come into use again were the government to insist upon complete equality of Negro and white in the South, yet the name of the nation is still the United States. But Eslanda is certainly right in saying that the reactionary South controls the nation in many important ways, and this brings much embarrassment to us before the world.

"Does any war ever win anything for the people who fight it?" I asked.

"Not so far as I can see!" Eslanda replied. "Some persons benefit quite a lot from wars, but that's another matter altogether. How any intelligent person, or even a moron, can think that large-scale death and destruction can win anything, is beyond me. I would like to say to the older people—mark you, the older people, for young people very sensibly never make wars because they have to do the fighting and dying—'Look, folks, so you want a war. That will kill a lot of people, burn up and tear down a lot of property, devastate a lot of good grain fields, and then you'll have to make a peace treaty. So why not make the peace treaty *before* instead of *after*, and save all that waste?'

"Of course I know this is a rhetorical question, and I

also know the answer. The answer is another question from the warmakers: 'If we make the peace treaty first, how are we going to make a few million dollars here and there in arms and concessions, and how are we going to justify our bigger and bigger military, and how will we keep populations down?' I get pretty cynical when I discuss this kind of thing with an intelligent person."

"Of course," I said, "one of the reasons the South continues to win the Civil War is because it is on the side of reaction and therefore, in the United States, on the side of power."

"That's true, but it's a little vague," Eslanda replied. "Let's be concrete about it. The reason the South won is because those Southerners who keep themselves in power are very realistic and practical. No vagueness or theory or principle about them—oh, no! When idealistic Northerners say, 'Look, you've got to give your Southern citizens their rights,' the South answers, 'Never mind that, you come along down here and we'll give you some nice cheap labor.' Naturally cheap labor to the industrial-minded Northerner is much more interesting than 'rights' for someone else. And when the poor white says, 'We must have better conditions of living,' the Southern politician says, *very* loudly, 'But look, you've got white supremacy—that's terrific!' And so it goes."

"When you say 'they' you mean—"

"The poll-tax politicians like Bilbo and Rankin and Eastland and the rest. Once in a while they come a cropper, though. There was that beautiful example in Tennessee, when the disgusted GIs got out their guns and said, 'We're going to break up this corrupt and stinking Crump political machine and have us some democracy. After all, that's what we fought for in Europe and the South Pacific. We might just as well fight for it here at home.' And they did, too. And was Mr. Crump surprised! And then, a few years ago Huey Long became so arrogant with his political

corruption that an infuriated American up and shot him dead."

I remembered a visit I had made to Louisiana. I had talked with many people. Some of them knew Huey Long for a demagogue but there were many good words for him among others. One day, especially, I remember. We were driving through the strange half-tropical countryside to look at a famous camellia garden, and in that landscape which reminded me so much of other landscapes beyond the Pacific Ocean, we crossed a handsome bridge. When I commented upon it, the white taxi driver said Huey Long had built it. Then he began to tell me all that he thought Huey Long had done for men like him. "He belonged to our kind of people," he summed it up. I had listened, silent and amazed.

"Why, in the South, did the small white man like Huey Long?" I now asked Eslanda.

She was contemptuous of this small white man. "Oh, that's what a lot of Italians said about Mussolini! They said, 'He did a lot for us—he cleaned the streets and made the trains run on time.' Maybe Huey Long did do a lot for some taxi drivers, farmers, and ward heelers—so what? The test is, what did he do for the mass of the people of Louisiana?"

"When I was in New Orleans I heard some hilarious stories about Huey Long. I was walking along a well-paved street, and was startled to find that the paving of the street and sidewalk ended abruptly. We walked a block of unpaved surface of dirt and mud, and then the paving began again. I asked if the road was torn up for the laying of sewers or electricity or gas, although the unpaved block didn't look like that at all—it looked like a block in the depth of the country, except for the close-together, neat, well-built houses. 'Oh no,' said my friend, 'no sewers or anything, just Huey Long. The most important man in this block was anti-Long, so Huey wouldn't let the city pave it.' Right in the middle of New Orleans!"

"Men like Huey Long get away with this sort of thing in America because they control the favors and the funds and the machinery for publicity, and this is a propaganda age. And most of the intellectuals and liberals, who understand the facts of the situation, sit back and sigh, 'Oh, isn't it terrible!' And they don't *do* anything! The moment anyone tries to do something about it, the propaganda machine goes into action and labels him disloyal to his Southern traditions, or radical, or 'anti'—or Communist. So it's dangerous to protest."

I mused aloud. "I can't see why good can't be more positive than evil—at least in a democracy."

"It could, if anybody would do it," Eslanda said. "But I'm afraid the passive 'good' person settles for the dubious moral satisfaction that anyway he knows and he disapproves. That's not good enough nowadays. Only when you get the wallop in person, do you up and try to do something about it—if you're worth your salt."

"I suppose the people who use corruption and gangsters as tools know they are vulnerable, and therefore have to protect themselves by all sorts of powers," I said.

"And they do!" Eslanda replied. "So there is no doubt whatever in my mind that the South won the Civil War. Look at Congress! When the Democratic party is in, who are the chairmen of all the important committees? Poll-tax Southerners!"

"The seniority rule should be changed, then," I said.

"Of course it should be changed," Eslanda agreed. "Seniority should be scrapped, and the most effective man should be made chairman of a committee."

"I suppose the seniority rule was made in the hope of providing stability in the government—they didn't foresee that it would be used to perpetuate reaction," I said.

I had not the heart to press Eslanda now for an answer to my question about loyalty. The true American must be loyal to the principles upon which our nation was founded, loyal to our Constitution, loyal to our Bill of Rights, loyal

to our form of government. But unworthy individuals who get into our government and themselves violate these sacred principles cannot expect loyalty merely because they sit in the seats of government. That would make them tyrants. A prince in an Indian state demands loyalty of his abject subjects, however bad a ruler he is. But we are free Americans still, and we can demand that the men who govern us shall govern as Americans. Loyal Americans, yes, but never subject to any man! Love of country must be kept clean. And that man or woman is the truest patriot who loves his country first, and because he loves his country well, demands that its government be good. No government can be better than the men who make it up—we say it but we must mean it.

Then why do loyal Americans allow evil, corrupt, or even petty men to be their government? The time has come for fundamental reform. The Constitution and the Bill of Rights stand as high as ever, veritable Rocks of Ages, in a world of peoples struggling to reach them and live secure in freedom. But they are surrounded by the mire of political machinery, and the people are caught and held in the mire.

I go to the polls to help choose the president, but I know that not one of the men cast up out of the mire is fit to be the president of our United States. What—is our nation so poor in men? No, there are good men here, able men, well suited to lead a democracy to its fulfillment in nation and world. But they are caught in the mire, too, with us. What are we afraid of, we Americans? Clean water still washes away mud.

I passed a sleepless night, thinking over what Eslanda has said about our country. Either she is made of tougher stuff than I am or else I had expected something in my country that doesn't exist. She has grown up here in the reality of America, whereas I had seen America as a dream across the seas. At any rate, Eslanda looked as fresh as

spring the next morning, although I knew that she certainly had no new optimism to revive her since yesterday. She will not be stopped even by mire. She will go on struggling through, continuing to feel as fresh as spring.

Looking at her with appreciation, I asked my next question. "Eslanda, has the coming of the Negro to this country, for whatever reason, shaped the nation at all?"

Eslanda laughed richly, "Somewhatly, as Langston Hughes, our Negro writer, says—somewhatly! But I wouldn't agree that it was only the coming of the Negro. It was the coming of the foreign born, all of them, in turn. But of course slavery did shape this nation. For instance, at first the slaves could be pushed around, and of course they couldn't vote; then the same thing happened with the 'immigrants,' and when one batch of immigrants escaped this onus it descended on the next batch—the more recent ones. Every time Americans wanted a very hard or very dirty job done, they invited or lured foreigners to come in and do it for them; the Chinese came to build the railroads and stayed to do the laundry; the Italians came to dig the ditches and stayed to grow gardens; the Irish came as servants, and stayed to be policemen, firemen, and bus drivers; the Poles and the Welsh came to mine the coal; the Scandinavians came to work in the kitchens and on the farms; the Germans came to make beer and be technicians; the Japanese came to garden and fish and be servants; the Mexicans came to gather in the crops, and so it went.

"And how have we treated these people who came to help us? We have looked down on them, called them names, denied them citizenship rights when we could. We haven't yet said, 'Thank you.' I think the worst thing slavery has done to this nation was to give some of our countrymen a superiority complex, and set up false values and standards, and enable a few people to rule the rest of us."

"Why don't the minorities get together?" I asked the

question with real curiosity. There are only about ten million people in our country who do not belong to one minority or another, Eslanda had told me.

"You are an optimist if you think ten million people rule America," she now said. "More likely it is a few hundred, or less. Remember Lundberg's famous book about the sixty families? There is a lot of truth in that story. In 1930 Ambassador Gerard gave a list of fifty-one people whom he considered America's 'rulers.' It included a solid proportion of tycoons and newspaper and magazine publishers and bankers, and very few statesmen. In 1947 John Gunther gave another list of sixty-four, and the personnel had changed a bit, for this one included several statesmen, several labor leaders, a distinguished scientist, and a Negro, as well as the tycoons and newspaper and magazine publishers. These rulers can and do keep the minorities separate. If the minorities ever get together on a program, we might really achieve some democracy in this country, because the sum total of all the minorities constitutes the majority of our population."

"Aren't there leaders in these minority groups who know what is happening?" I inquired.

"You must remember that leaders are human beings, and even leaders of minorities can also be corrupted. But most of them keep right on working for unity, and keep right on getting slapped down—because, remember, the rulers control the money, the influence, the propaganda machines, and now our Congress. The whole situation has got so bad that the moment any citizen lifts up his voice against undemocratic procedures and behavior, he is called a Communist, and off we go on this absurd whirl against communism."

"Let's go back to freedom of the individual," I said. For some subconscious reason whenever Eslanda mentions communism I always go back to this matter of individual freedom. It is a wonder that she bears with me so patiently.

"You believe in individual freedom because you have

quite a lot of it. You're lucky," Eslanda said frankly but without sharpness.

"I do have individual freedom. How am I different from you?" I asked.

Eslanda replied with questions of her own. "Can I get a flat in the building in which you live when you are in New York? Can I go South with you on a lecture tour? If you want to go and live in Mississippi, or any part of the Deep South, you can. What about me? If I did, I wouldn't be able to vote, I'd have to be careful not to be 'sassy,' I'd have to 'walk humble' as Negroes say, in order to preserve my right to 'life, liberty,' not to mention my 'pursuit of happiness.' My individual freedom isn't doing so well.

"Millions of my people live in the South, remember! And then, if we add up the other millions in America who don't have this individual freedom—the Orientals, the Jews, the American Indians, the Mexicans, the poor whites—you begin to see what I mean."

To her list I add our industrial migrants. Year after year I see them return by the thousands to great industrial farms near us, half-starved, illiterate men and women with their children growing up to even worse conditions. Homeless, living always in temporary shelter, eating refuse and trash, these Americans exist in deeper misery than any people in Asia. What becomes of them when they fall ill? How do they manage when they grow old? Who buries them when they die?

"You told me you don't feel being a Negro?" I reminded Eslanda.

"That's true—I don't feel particularly being a *Negro*, but I certainly do feel being in a minority—that is, special, in the discriminated-against sense.

"How about this freedom of the individual? Pearl, would you be willing to give up a little of yours, so that one hundred fifty million Americans could have some?"

"How could I do that?" I asked. "Am I not born free, as Paul was in old Rome?"



## AMERICAN ARGUMENT

Eslanda said very gravely. "You can do it by seeing clearly, and then admitting, that this system of ours which we call democracy, but which is not that, really, has not worked as it was supposed to work, and that therefore we must either make it work, or change it to some system that will work to give the maximum of our people the maximum benefits.

"Now don't holler communism, because I'm not talking about communism! I'm considering socialism, as a matter of fact, and I'm considering it along with a great many other people, here and abroad, including the Soviets, if you please. In your objection to communism, which is really objection to the Soviet system of state socialism, remember, you say very clearly that you are defending your freedom of the individual. I feel you are defending something very personal and selfish—" Eslanda paused.

"Go ahead," I told her.

"It sounds impertinent when it comes out in words—"

"Never mind! This is just what I ought to know."

So Eslanda went ahead. "If you will examine your precious 'freedom of the individual' carefully, you will see how very expensive it is, in terms of what happens to the rest of our population who haven't got it. You might find that even to you it isn't worth the cost to others. For example, you are too sound a human being and too generous a person to want to overeat when people right next door are starving. I think if the situation were made clear to you, you not only would not overeat, you would cut down your diet to necessities, in order to prevent hunger on the part of your fellow citizens. I don't think it is stretching a simile too far to say that this is exactly what the American privileged class is doing to their fellow citizens, to the 'one-third of the nation.' They are overeating their 'freedom of the individual' at the expense of hunger and starvation of that freedom on the part of the majority of the American people. Remember, remember, the sum total of the minorities is our majority!"

This was strong stuff and I swallowed hard. "Eslanda, there are plenty more like me who have a comfortable life because they have worked and have a little intelligence or ability. No one has obstructed what I have done but no one has helped me. I have done it all—"

"On muscle, as Pauli says—" Eslanda broke in.

"Yes, 'on muscle'," I agreed. "But the thing I like is, I could do it. Many people don't like all I do and I get complaints sometimes from churches, government officials, women's clubs, and plenty of individuals. I can write back and tell them why I did what they don't like. But no one ever says, 'You have to do this,' or 'You shut up!'—unless it is some lunatic or a silly person. There is nobody in this country who says, 'Don't write that book' or, 'Don't say that.' Now, I value this above all else."

Eslanda was ready at once with her argument in answer to mine. "Pearl, from what I can find out from school teachers, and from people in many kinds of jobs, right here in our 'free' country, you can't say this, or write that, or belong to this or that group, or go to the races, or do many, many different kinds of things, and still hold your job! Now unfortunately, to these people, their jobs are their living, and they just can't afford to lose them. So they do 'shut up,' and they *don't* do all the nice free things you can do. It's a matter of just how *many* of us have this precious freedom!

"You have it. Right! I can see your point, and you are right as far as you go. But let's take your case a little further. You wrote *The Good Earth*, which was a best-seller. That put you right on top, in a position of prestige and power. Since then you have maintained that position by hard work. So you have achieved success and increased your prestige and power. But even so, people can and do say to you, though in quite different words, 'You can't write this,' and 'You can't say that.' They do this when they refuse to film a good book you wrote because they consider the book 'unsuitable' for the screen. They do this

when magazines refuse to take your ideas about stories because the advertisers won't like them, or the editors are still thinking in terms of their sweet youth.

"You try to sound off on what you know about conditions in China, and you will soon find out how pressure can be put on you. And, horrid thought, if you should become interested in, and approve of, communism after all, and if you stood up and said so, you would most certainly find out fast how much freedom you have to speak your mind. So it seems to me, in the last analysis, even in your extraordinarily strong position, you haven't got all that 'freedom of the individual' you think you have. And if I may say so, you haven't got it, because I haven't got it; to follow through with the idea, none of us has it until all of us have it.

"Let me see if I can show you what I mean by a concrete example. You may feel that Big Paul, because of his position and prestige, has this freedom while the majority of other Negroes haven't got it. All right! Now let's suppose Big Paul goes down to Mississippi in the backwoods, and says casually the things he says up here. What do you suppose would happen to him? He'd be strung up—lynched! And don't say, 'They can't lynch him because he's Mr. Robeson.' A lot of people in the backwoods of Mississippi have never heard of Mr. Robeson, and to them he'd be just another nigger; and what they can, and do, do to niggers down there, they can and will do to him, if they feel like it. They've never been punished for lynching before, have they? So why not? So maybe you will agree that Big Paul has just as much freedom as any Negro in the United States has—no more, no less, in the final analysis."

"But can't we work for freedom? Isn't that an American right?" I asked her.

"Maybe you can, but I can't," she retorted.

"But you do, Eslanda, all the time!"

"How?" she demanded. "I take it our government is

still the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. How do I fight them? On the contrary, I go around the country fighting *for* them. And fighting *against* whom? Against some of our so-called public servants, servants of the government, who keep insisting upon denying me and a lot of other citizens our rights. I always stay well within the law, both the letter and the spirit of the law.

"I admit that maybe some of our more reactionary servants of the government would like to put me in jail for these activities, and from time to time the FBI has been interested in me, but they couldn't very well put me in prison without making themselves ridiculous. Being the wife of a celebrity, there is some publicity value attached to me, and people might be interested in what happened to me, and why."

"Suppose you had no publicity value?" I asked.

"I could be lynched tomorrow in some parts of the South for my activities."

"But our government would never do anything to you!"

"No? In lynching areas, isn't the sheriff the representative of the government? Sheriffs sometimes connive and even assist at lynchings."

Eslanda fell silent and I could see she was remembering something. Then she said, "We had a particularly unpleasant experience in the West some years ago when I was out on a concert tour with Paul and Larry. We arrived at a large town and were met at the railroad station by the local concert manager. He told us that we were not going to the hotel, as planned, but to the home of a very nice colored family.

"Now we knew that there was segregation in this town and that the Negro section was a slum. We had reservations at the very modern first-class hotel, and the reservations had been confirmed. We had been touring for several months, and did not feel like taking any nonsense. Quite suddenly I got very angry about the whole business, and told the manager, who was white, that we would definitely

## AMERICAN ARGUMENT

go to the hotel, that it was charming of the Negro family whom we did not know to offer us hospitality, and we were grateful for it; but we were very tired and would just have to have the facilities of the hotel.

"The manager hemmed and hawed and finally admitted that the hotel would not take us because we were colored. I said they had confirmed our reservations. Yes, but . . . No buts, not this time, I told him. No hotel, no concert. Period. 'But you cannot cancel your concert! You have a contract, and we can sue you,' said the manager. 'I'm glad you understand the law out here,' I answered, 'because we have a contract with the hotel, in the form of a confirmed reservation, and we'll sue, too. We have a very good lawyer in New York, and so let's just turn it all over to the legal departments, and forget the whole thing until we meet in court.' Paul and Larry were amused at my annoyance, and just sat quietly and watched me hold forth. When the manager appealed directly to them, they said innocently, 'She's our representative and has charge of us. Sorry!' So the manager went to telephone the hotel, to see what he could do. While he was telephoning, we all agreed that no hotel, no concert. We knew the concert hall had been sold out for weeks in advance, and we felt sure the local people would not cancel it.

"Well, the hotel agreed to take us, after all, and we got the suite we had reserved. The hotel manager asked us to use the freight elevator, and not to eat in the public dining room. We never eat in public before a concert anyway, because Paul doesn't like to use his voice talking to people then. The hotel manager and the local concert manager apologized for the necessity for all this, and said, 'The other guests would leave if we accepted Negroes.'

"Later when we came downstairs—in the passenger elevator—and passed through the lobby en route to the concert hall, we were delayed for more than fifteen minutes by the hotel guests who swarmed about Paul, greeting him, requesting autographs, requesting special favorites for en-

cores, inviting him to supper following the concert. I shall always remember a man and wife and their three children, a charming family, who said to Paul, 'Mr. Robeson, we came to the hotel for dinner, hoping to catch a glimpse of you in the dining room. It's very exclusive and selfish of you to eat in your rooms.' These were some of the guests 'who would leave if the hotel accepted Negroes!'

"How does it happen that such persons as this hotel man get into seats of power, high and low, throughout the country?" I asked.

"I suppose because the average person is afraid," Eslanda said, "or can't afford to take a stand against this kind of thing, and so it keeps on happening, and finally freezes into a pattern that comes to be accepted. Then when some of us try to break the pattern, we are told, 'People would never stand for that, they are not accustomed to . . . ' etc. Very few people can afford to protest, to challenge the pattern. Some of those few who can afford to will not, for fear of losing what they have. We are very lucky, we can afford to, and we do. One concert, one play, one film more or less won't make or break us. We are, thank heaven, independent, and mean to remain so if it kills us."

It was at this point that it occurred to me that we should call our book *American Argument*.

I said, "Our country now is in a state where I realize that we must argue, we must discuss. I am very conservative in many ways because I was reared in a conservative country—in China, where revolution is looked upon as foolish and wasteful."

"The fact that you feel you must argue, that you must do something, in spite of your conservatism, is an indication of the seriousness of our time," Eslanda replied. "The British are conservative, but they feel they not only must argue, they must change, and they are changing now to socialism."

But we Americans do not like even the mild English form of socialism. During the war how monstrous it was

## AMERICAN ARGUMENT

considered to speak an ill word of anything England did, however truthful, and however remote—even as remote as India! Today, one can say what one likes about England. There are no powerful American protests. It is almost as though we felt England had gone over to the enemy, now that socialism is there!

# IX

## *Ourselves and the World*

THESE ARE HEART-SEARCHING DAYS FOR ME. I KNOW Eslanda is telling the truth as she sees it, and that it is not easy for her. She loves our country, in her way, as much as I do. But my way is not hers; I am slowly beginning to see that. Hers is deep, bitter, strong love, shot through with pain. She has suffered at the hands of the country she loves. Through no fault of her own, she is part of its evil and shame. I, on the contrary, have received only benefit from being American. It is my own fault that I am not content with this. I might, if I would, live a life complete in ease and pleasure, unaware of anything wrong inside my country.

I said one day to Eslanda, "You have got all you wanted in life. You have done it 'on muscle,' but you have everything people are supposed to want. You don't have to be afraid, you have overcome every handicap. Then why aren't you satisfied with America?"

She replied, "In the first place, I haven't always had everything, and I remember clearly the times when I didn't have things. Now I have everything that most people want, but I would like more people to have at least some of what I have. That sounds pompous, but I don't mean it that way. I may even mean it selfishly. I know that people are not going to continue to starve forever, in the midst of plenty; I know that they are not going to sit by quietly and be kicked around forever, without doing



something about it. People are doing something about this now, everywhere. When they do enough, we'll have revolutions and then where is my luxury, where is my freedom? If I give up some of it now, I may be ensuring the major part of it indefinitely. Could be!

"And while I am not afraid, personally, I am afraid as a member of a minority. When some hoodlums break the windows of Jewish shops right down the road in Hartford, Connecticut, I don't feel quite so secure in my lovely home a few miles away in Enfield. When they lynch a Negro anywhere, when they take property away from American citizens of Japanese ancestry and isolate them in deserts, when they fine and imprison Communists, when Supreme Court judges walk out on restrictive-covenant cases, I feel afraid, because when any of these things happen to any American citizen, I know they can happen to any other American citizen, and I know they can happen to me. You will come to see that they can happen to you, too, if this trend continues."

"Doesn't Mr. Robeson sing in the South quite safely?" I asked.

"Yes, and that's interesting. When he goes South, the way is prepared for him by the Negroes who have invited him. He usually goes to the Negro colleges. They invite their white friends to hear him, providing they are willing to sit anywhere in the audience. For years now, Paul has made it a condition in his concert and theater contracts that there be no segregation in his audiences. Interestingly enough, the prejudice he has run up against has not been as a Negro in the South, but as an American citizen who stands up for his own rights, as well as for those of all American citizens, especially of labor. He was refused a hall in Albany, New York, of all places, and at Peoria, Illinois, on the ground that he was suspected of being a Communist. When enough citizens protested, he was allowed to sing at the hall in Albany after all, but not so in Peoria. Of course Peoria is in a very bad section; all of

southern Illinois is bad and dangerous. Many strikes have been broken, with violence, even murder, in that area."

"I'm afraid that in China and India a great deal was made of that Peoria incident," I said.

"They'd make even more of it if they heard about it happening in Russia," she retorted.

I put a question which had come to me often. "Why should even ordinary people here be afraid of communism? They are not secure anyway. I can see why people who are well off would dread communism, but why those who are not?"

"The ordinary people have jobs which they have been told, over and over again, depend on the system," Eslanda replied. "The civil-service employees, the teachers, the police, the clerks in banks and big companies, all think they would lose their jobs if anything happened to the system. After all, they are told day after day, 'Communism wants to overthrow the system—the government—by force and violence.'

"I have never understood how our bigots keep on getting away with this particular little item. Maybe Mr. Marx did say so—I told you I don't know as much about Marx as I should—but I do know that in the twenty or more years Communists have existed in this country, they have never once used 'force and violence' against the government. In fact, it has been the other way round, force and violence has been used against them."

"Now, Eslanda," I said, "you must take into account what people tell us who have lived under communism and have left it because they cannot endure its oppression. Some of them at least must be honest."

Eslanda interrupted me.

"I'm afraid I'm skeptical about what I call 'exes'! For instance, if I want a comprehensive estimate of a man, I wouldn't listen only to his ex-wife. Granted, she would know a lot about him, having lived with him for years and maybe borne his children, but being an ex-wife, having

divorced him—or been divorced—she is very likely to be prejudiced. If I want a really comprehensive estimate of a man, I want the opinion of his ex-wife, the current wife, the girl who knew him in his school days and football days, the boys he grew up with, the men he works with now, his boss, his office boy, the men he drinks and plays cards with, his children, his parents, his teachers, his doctor, his social friends, and his housekeeper. When I added all these opinions together, I think I would be able to get a fairly comprehensive picture of the man. And then, I'd be able properly to weigh the opinion of the 'ex.' ”

I mused aloud. “Maybe average American people like myself think of communism as something complete rather than as something in process. We, too, are in process. Peoples proceed along very similar lines, some, like ourselves, from the individualistic, and others from the socialistic and even the communistic point of view. Beginnings can be very different indeed. Russian history and ours, for example, are different! I told you I was in Russia in the old days and the chasm between rich and poor was horrible. People like Tolstoy were miserable—one would simply have to have no conscience in order to live as those rich, aristocratic Russians did. It is still like that in China—and in India, too. We Americans began entirely differently. It is hard for us to understand!”

“If the American people could understand,” Eslanda said, “maybe they wouldn't be so dead set on keeping what's left of those aristocrats in the saddle in China, and in Europe where they have managed to hang on, in Greece, Italy, Spain, and Portugal. They just couldn't hang on in the Balkans, and so we are very mad at the Balkans, and blame it all on the Russians.” She laughed. “Well, I think it will all come out in the wash! Our dollars and soldiers won't be able to bolster up a finished class of people. These aristocrats have had charge of things in their countries for generations, and look what they have accomplished—poverty, illiteracy, and general backwardness! It's

time to let others try their hands. A new regime couldn't do any worse, and may very easily do better. Could be!"

Eslanda threw me a look that had something more than mischief in it. "I keep remembering that it was these aristocrats who harped on the freedom of the individual! Sure, freedom of their individuality, and their privacy, but what about the peasants, and the serfs, and the workers in general?

"You know, Pearl, the more I think about this individual freedom we've talked so much about, the more clearly I see the difference between you and me. We both have freedom to a large extent, I grant you, but the difference between us is that I am—and can be—thrown back into the minority handicaps and you cannot. If I could bounce you back into a minority group for a bit, you would see as clearly as I do."

"You can't bounce me back there, because, except that I am a woman, I have no handicaps," I said.

"Yes, that's the difference," she agreed. "But once you admit an exception, then you're in for it. If an exception can be made, what is the guarantee of when and what kind of exception can be made? That's what I keep talking about. You are a member of a minority now, in that you are a woman. You may be a member of another minority tomorrow, because you disagree with what our government is doing in China, just as I am because I disagree with their attitude toward Russia. At this rate, you never know when or where you'll be bounced back into a minority, and suffer its handicaps. So we will just have to get together and see that nobody can do anything to any member of any minority, just because they have a certain color, creed, national origin, or political opinion. If we don't do this, and fast, here and abroad, we're going to have that war."

"What war?" I asked. Did I not know? I had been avoiding the word for days.

## AMERICAN ARGUMENT

"The war our military government is trying to scare us with now," Eslanda replied firmly.

"What do you think another war would do to us here in the United States?" I asked.

"All kinds of bad things! First and most important, a lot of people would be killed, uselessly. Last and not so incidentally, a few people, probably those close to the government, would make a lot of money."

"Suppose we win it?"

"Win or lose, my Pauli and your sons might be gone."

"Would another war change our way of living?"

"Maybe! So what? So we would still have to get along with the other people in the world, if there are any left. So why don't we try very hard to get along with them now? Before! Whatever we may have to surrender to do it, it would still be cheaper than another war. You know, in trying to think through this Third World War idea that everybody is talking about, I have come to a fantastic conclusion: We, the United States, are stronger than any other nation is now, we are in undisputed control of half the earth and all the oceans, and we have the atomic bomb all ready, stock-piled, and we have more than half the productive capacity of the world right here in America. In this very strong position it is utter nonsense to talk about our being afraid of anybody, afraid physically, that is. But we are very much afraid of Russian ideology, and that is another cup of tea altogether.

"So how shall we defend ourselves? There is a lot of talk about the Voice of America, but what can the poor Voice say, considering conditions in our country today? Not much that would have any weight!

"The military men and the bankers who control our government are probably thinking, 'Now that we are so strong, why don't we polish off Russia fast? Then we could control the world. If we don't, the idea of socialism will spread and spread—it has even got hold of dear old Eng-

land—then where would we be with our precious “free” enterprise?’

“Well, how to do a war? It would be a bit thick just to go out and start one, all by ourselves. Maybe we could say the Balkan countries started one by intervention in Greek affairs? But that won’t wash, because we have intervened in Greece more than anybody else. Maybe we could start one in China, by saying the Russians intervened by supporting the Communists? But now that won’t wash, either, because we keep getting reports which we can’t seem to suppress, that the Communists get their arms from the Chiang government, which in turn gets them from us. Maybe in Korea? Maybe in Berlin? We’ll see—we’ll see! Surely there must be some place we can start a war!

“If it were not such a grim spectacle, it would be rather like a girl having a gorgeous new evening gown, the very latest model, and searching around for a party to wear it to; if no party is going on, maybe she’ll have to give one herself.”

“I once had an experience that helps me understand your point of view about individual freedom better than you think I do,” I said to Eslanda. “Years ago in China the city where I was living was invaded by revolutionary Chinese soldiers. The white people especially were attacked. Seven white people were killed that day, among them an American vice-president of the university. A Chinese woman for whom I had once done a small kindness took us into her hut and saved our lives, but we ended the day with nothing but the clothes in which we stood. Our home was gone, and for a while we thought we would be killed. We weren’t, for actually we were saved by American, Japanese, and English gunboats that came to restore order.”

“You say ‘to restore order,’ and I say it might have been to intervene in Chinese affairs,” Eslanda put in.

“I don’t hold with gunboats myself,” I replied. “My feeling was and is that anybody who wants to go in an-

other country to live must take all the dangers. Anyhow, this was an emergency and we didn't stand on ceremony. But what really makes me understand what you say about giving up personal freedom is that all the white people gathered together until there were over a hundred of us in a university building. In that emergency we all went Communist. Our Chinese friends smuggled in toothbrushes, towels, and food. We appointed a committee to decide what everybody would eat, how food was to be portioned out, and where everybody would be, and for two days we lived under a complete Communist system, all in one big hall together. In the war we did a little of that with our rationing."

"Yes," Eslanda said, "we did have rationing of a sort, but when you see rationing done sincerely and successfully as it is being done in England now, you can see how we played about with it with our black markets and racketeers!"

"Let's go back to being women for a while," I suggested. "Why don't women do something about it?"

"I wish they would. You do what you can, and I do what I can. But just think what we could do if we all worked together! Half the population of the world consists of women. We should, reasonably, be shouldering half the responsibility for running the world. We couldn't make a worse job of it than the men have done, and we might easily make a better job. The average woman is fairly practical, fairly concrete-minded, and accustomed to handling problems in the large. By that I mean she has to run the home, the family, the budget, bring up the children. She would know much more about rationing, for instance, than men know, because she plans the meals and does the shopping. Women should have charge of national and world planning for food, clothing, housebuilding, health, child welfare.

"It may sound frivolous, but I think it is indicative of the way women are not used in this country, when one

hears men announcers on radio programs talking about how to wash dishes, whip up a salad, blue the washing, and so forth. We all know that men don't as a rule have anything to do with these things! It would be much more realistic and dignified, I think, for women to talk about these things. But apparently the radio stations 'make it a policy' to use men. Some few women are being used, but not nearly enough.

"It would be so easy, if enough of us got together and insisted upon it, to 'make it a policy' to do some democratic, sensible things. All we'd need to do is to get the word passed down from the top. We would 'make it a policy,' but this time it would be a good policy. For instance, in states where fair employment practices have been made a policy and made a law, the employment situation has improved enormously, with a minimum of coercion.

"Specifically, I remember the experience of the workers in a branch of the War Department, which was moved from Washington to Newark, New Jersey. It was the bureau that took care of soldiers' dependents, handling allotments, and so on. While this bureau was housed in Washington, there was segregation of the thousands of Negro workers. It was suggested to the War Department that when they moved to Newark they discontinue this segregation. Many Negro leaders insisted upon this, and enough other people supported them to influence the War Department to 'make it a policy' to abolish segregation in this particular bureau when it came to Newark. Some people objected, but they were told that this was the 'policy.' Some white workers said they would not use the same restaurants and rest rooms as Negro workers and would not work at desks side by side with them. 'Sorry,' said the top echelons, 'that's the way it's going to be; if you can't accept it, you will have to find another job.' Of course it all worked out very well indeed. White and Negro workers worked side by side, ate together, washed hands together, and some became friends. It was as simple



as that, as normal as that, and would always happen if it were not deliberately prevented.

"You know, I may be wrong, but I have a feeling that many Southerners, even, are tired of all this foolishness, all this expensive elaborate segregation, but they are afraid to admit it lest in their territory they be considered antisocial, or be called 'nigger-lover' and labeled disloyal to Southern tradition. I believe they would love to have somebody from the top say to them, 'Look here, this stuff is out from now on—it's too impractical; we've decided to "make it a policy" to have no more segregation. You must hire Negroes for the jobs they can do, pay them equal wages, allow them equal access to all public services. If you don't do these things, we'll cut off your funds and support of all kinds.' This may sound drastic, but I honestly believe a great many Southerners would be relieved, and would think, 'Good! Now, nobody can accuse me of being disloyal, or call me names. The government has called the turn.' Just as certain people can 'make it a policy' to do undemocratic things, just so certain other people can 'make it a policy' to do democratic things."

"Do you think that would lead to dictatorship?" I asked.

"So what?" she retorted. "We have dictatorship now, but it's bad dictatorship. Why wouldn't it be an improvement to switch over to a good dictatorship, in order to make things more democratic?"

"Now, Eslanda, you are saying something terribly dangerous!"

"Pearl, what we have been and are doing is much more dangerous. So let's talk dangerously!"

"A dictator would be all right if he is a good man, but how would you guarantee him?" I asked.

"Well, how do we guarantee our congressmen?" Eslanda asked. "We could guarantee our dictator, if we have to have a dictator, in the same way. But this conversation is a bit vague. All we need to do in this country is to enforce our Constitution and Bill of Rights. Along with set-

ting up these magnificent documents in the Freedom Train, we should set them up in the living performance of the American people. That's all we need to do. If it takes a dictator to do it, then I'm all for a dictator."

"Suppose the dictator decided to use the Army and keep office by force?"

"Don't look now, but they're way ahead of you! They're already putting the Army in office."

"In other words," I said, "what you are advocating is to choose a president, give him absolute power, he to have that absolute power as long as he does the will of the people."

"Let's be a little more democratic, and follow the American tradition, as it is written," she said. "Let's choose a president and a cabinet and members of Congress and local representatives who will represent the majority of the people, and carry out their will. That seems reasonable enough on the face of it, although under our present set-up it sounds like revolution."

"How are you going to guarantee that president getting out?" I persisted.

"If the voters are intelligent enough and alert enough, they will keep him in or move him out, according to how he carries out their will. Myself, I don't care whether he stays there fifty years, so long as he carries out the will of the people. That's where we disagree about Stalin. For me, the accent is on *what he does*, not on *how long he is in office*."

"What you are advocating is something like what England has," I remarked.

"No, but I must say that I like the idea in England and France, that the current government has to secure a vote of confidence at every crisis, and if they don't get it they have to resign. I love that part of it. No, I'm not advocating what England has, or what Russia has, or what anybody else has. Let's face it once more: What I'm advocating is what we Americans are *supposed* to have and what

we are guaranteed by our Constitution and Bill of Rights. We should have it. I want it, and I'm going to fight for it."

I said, "Here we are, two American women, friends, disagreeing on fundamentals—no, not on fundamentals but on methods. Now suppose, just as a dream, we could have a voice in the remaking of our government. We are both familiar with the process and both of us are very assiduous in voting and so on, and neither of us is politically ambitious. What ought our people to do? How can we overcome what is evil at the top of our government? We occasionally get someone who is big, but most of the time we just get little people for the big jobs."

"First of all," Eslanda said, "I would try to find the right man for the right job, from the very lowest level to the highest. That may sound vague at first glance, but I think it's practical, and would solve one of our greatest faults.

"We have ambassadors to powerful foreign countries, appointed not because they understand the language and customs of the people of those countries, but given the job as a political plum. And so on down the line. We have millions of teachers teaching not because they like children or like teaching, but because teaching is a reasonably secure job. We have at least some doctors practicing, not because they like medicine, but because it is a good paying business; as a result, look at the conservatism, to give its behavior a very polite name, of the American Medical Association!

"I was struck sharply by this whole pattern some time ago in New York. I was riding in a taxi in the theater section, and the driver apologized for making so little progress. 'The traffic in this town is a mess,' he said disgustedly.

" 'It seems they are trying to relieve the situation by not allowing cars to be parked in the busy streets,' I said.

" 'So what?' he replied angrily. 'They got a committee to investigate the traffic, and whom do they put on the committee? Some bankers and department-store execu-

tives! What the hell do they know about traffic? I ask you!

" 'Well, they have a labor representative from some drivers' union too, haven't they?' I asked.

" 'Sure, sure, some big shots in the union, who maybe drive their cars on holidays and evenings when they take the family out. What do they know about what goes on in the rush hours? They're eatin' lunch somewhere, or catching a bus or subway home.'

" 'What kind of people should be on the committee to make it good?' I asked.

" 'A couple of taxi drivers, a couple of truck drivers, a couple of pedestrians—they help to make the traffic too, you know—and a couple of civilian drivers and a couple of traffic policemen. Those people make the traffic, so they know about it, so they'd know what to do. These stuffed shirts don't know what it's all about.'

"It makes sense, doesn't it, Pearl? And yet we know it is typical of us that we choose for committees people whose names will 'lend weight' or 'have influence,' far too often. I think it is an eloquent comment on our system that this year, for the first time, we have appointed a postal employee, a former postman, as postmaster general.

"So, to come back to our dream of having a voice in our government, I would be able to vote for a man or woman for the lowest to the highest political office because I think he or she is well equipped, intellectually, technically, morally, and personally, to fulfill that office honestly and efficiently.

"To get down to practicalities, in our famous two-party system, we voters have no choice at the crucial level. We cannot choose the men for the slate which will be offered to us for voting. Then, once the slate is offered, millions of our citizens can't vote at all, because of poll taxes. There is another lot of citizens who don't bother to vote, because they have become discouraged by the corruption in our political system. They say, 'Democrat or Republican, what difference does it make?' Then we have another

section of the people who hold political jobs—civil-service employees, government employees, and so on. I think many of these people vote for their jobs. Add them all up, and we find that our leaders are elected by an astonishingly small percentage of the potential voters.”

“Isn’t that true in any country?” I asked. “Can we expect so much of any government?”

“At least the Soviet Union hasn’t got the spoils system,” Eslanda declared. “There is a reward of merit.”

“I want to put a question to you,” I said. “One of the great differences I notice in the character of the American people from the character of all other peoples I know, which would include Chinese, Indians, Japanese, English—I would except the French from this—is that we have no reverence for any person. In the opinion of the crowd we have no great people.”

“That’s true, and it’s interesting,” Eslanda replied. “Let’s examine it. We have temporary heroes, and celebrities—film and stage stars, millionaires, writers. We have celebrities, but no great people. Though maybe some of us felt that Roosevelt was ‘kinda’ great!”

“We have no person to correspond to the great scholars of China, no great leaders like Nehru and Gandhi in India,” I said.

“Maybe Einstein?”

“In his field.”

“But now world affairs, in terms of atomic energy, are invading his field, and he is measuring up very well indeed. As I understand it, in the East there is a special teacher-pupil relationship which goes much further than ours in the West. Maybe our way of life doesn’t breed reverence. Or maybe we would reverence a person if we found one who would rate it.”

“At least we don’t reverence little men,” I said. “But why don’t we repudiate the little man and keep him from getting into high places? I have never understood the tolerance of our people for small ineffectual persons in

places of government. Is it a fear of powerful men, a feeling that a little man never could get to be a big boss?"

"We just don't bother," Eslanda replied. "Maybe Hitler wasn't so far wrong when he said we were flabby."

"That brings me to something else, Eslanda, and it is the matter self-discipline in a republic. I have been hearing very much from a friend of mine who has just come from Germany about the behavior of some of our boys over there. Far too few of them have any self-discipline. Military discipline doesn't produce self-discipline; it produces discipline in front of the big boss and, of course, that is nothing. To my mind, if I had to pick one foundation strong enough for a successful democracy, I would say it rests on self-discipline—indeed, civilization rests on self-discipline. Our children go to school to learn facts, apparently, not to learn self-discipline."

"Yes, and to pass examinations on those facts!" Eslanda agreed. "I remember very clearly how I resented this system in my young school life. And that's one reason I enjoy school now. I study subjects that I have to, and of course want to, *understand*, not memorize. When I was young I used to have a wonderful time trying to understand the things I was taught, but then there always came an exam time, when I had to cram list after list of facts, hold them in the surface of my brain overnight, put them down on my exam paper next day, and then I could relax, and not have to worry about them any more."

"The Chinese people," I told Eslanda, "I am convinced, owe their civilization to the fact that they are self-disciplined more than anything else. In China when children go to school it is a very formal thing. The children are given to the teacher and the teacher is responsible for their character. Our teachers don't bear the responsibility for our children's character as much as they should."

"No," she agreed with a little hesitation, "I know a good many schoolteachers. I think they are overworked and underpaid and some of the principals, superintend-

dents, and supervisors are smalltime dictators in bigtime jobs. We would have to reorganize our whole educational system if we hope to get the kind of teacher who could not only develop the pupil's thinking, but his character as well. As it is now, many teachers just check into school at nine and watch the clock after lunch for getting away on time. I think the system that makes that kind of teacher is the traitor. Many people realize that the system is bad, and it is getting harder and harder to persuade qualified people to go into it."

"I am distressed by the kind of things our children get in our schools." I went on. "I don't see where any of it has the slightest reference to character. Children go to school and they are away from home all day. When they get back they are tired and want to play, and except for Saturday and Sunday and a brief period each day, the parents have little chance at them. I am disgusted when even my own children come back and say things like, 'What does it get me?' It outrages me. They didn't get this attitude at home—they got it at school."

"They go to a good American school," Eslanda said, "and there they learn the good American attitude, which is, 'What does it get *me*?' Not very pretty, is it? And this is the way of life we are trying to wish on the rest of the world! Well, it means that those of us who do not believe in this way of life have to do double duty. We have to resist it ourselves, and we have to keep taking time out to refute it to our children. It makes our homework all the more important."

"In a way, I have a grim joke on you, Pearl, at this point. Your white children want to be the same as the other children, in spite of what they learn at home. So you have to teach them that no matter what the other children do, they are to do this, that, and so-and-so. They resent this. Now with my Negro child, he has been told, figuratively, that he is different anyway, and that he just can't be

like the little white children. So my job is easier when it comes to teaching values and attitudes."

"What am I to do, as a white Protestant American?" I asked.

"You will have to make the schools better if you are going to turn your children over to them; failing that, you will have to keep on doing this character building yourself, at home."

"I can only say to the children, 'I don't care what the whole world does, we don't do it in our home.'"

"That's exactly what I tell Pauli! I know I have to do the character building at home. It's work, but it is also a challenge, and a lot of fun. It certainly takes time."

"I tell mine they are different, and everybody who thinks for himself is different, and they have got to take that."

"So do I. But we know of course we are putting them on the spot, and they don't like it. That is part of the expense of our being individual, I daresay."

"It is very difficult for me to grasp the fact that our education has almost nothing to do with making good character," I said.

"We have a few clichés—good sportsmanship, love of country, but nothing the children can really get their teeth into," Eslanda said gravely. "Our way of life doesn't put the accent on character; the accent is on whether you can make a success or not."

"But think of the wicked phrases young people use so much now!" I exclaimed. "'What does it get me?' And another one almost worse, 'You can't win!' Children ought to be taught that if it gets everybody around you something, it gets you wonders, and you can always win if you want to! I know that young people catch phrases from each other and don't mean them. But I am psychologist enough to know, too, that constant repetition, even careless, has its effect, especially upon weak or lazy minds."

"I know how you feel," Eslanda said. "I remember I had quite a job with Pauli over this 'winning' business in quite



another form. I had to combat the old competitive spirit, which is overdone, I think. Pauli got an overdose of it, and always wanted to win at games, when he was quite young. It distressed him to lose. Normally this sort of thing is taken care of by experience with better players—you learn how to ‘take it.’ But Pauli was, and is, very good at games, and takes the time and patience to become expert in the ones he likes. So he usually wins. He always won in his young days, and we had to explain to him that it is rude *always* to beat your opponent, and that it might discourage children from playing with him. We suggested that in tennis, for instance, if he found himself always winning, he should not concentrate on the scoring, but instead practice some new or difficult strokes and placings, thus improving his game while allowing his opponent to win. This appealed to him, and he soon became a gracious loser, but even more important, he developed other interests in games besides that of winning.

“But to go back to this ‘You can’t win,’ it is the defeatist attitude. If something doesn’t pay off with immediate success or prizes or money, or power or prestige, if you don’t get something tangible out of it at once, then why bother with it? So they don’t bother. That’s bad.”

“Where is self-discipline to come from?” I asked.

“At present, it has to come from the family, from the home. Our schools cannot do it as they are now. We could set them up to do it. We pay the taxes, so why shouldn’t we insist upon the kind of schools we want for our money? We should try for a different type of personnel and a different type of curriculum. As you suggested a while back, we should not concentrate so much on the learning of facts, we should teach the children to examine the facts in their larger context, to think through and weigh statements. And we really should insist upon human relations courses, from kindergarten right on up.

“We should select and train teachers who can teach, who like teaching, and who like young people. Pauli sometimes

tells me, 'That prof. knows his stuff, but he can't make us know it.' I'm sure you've heard your children say the same kind of thing. 'I want to get into So-and So's class because he's a good teacher.' I remember Pauli telling me about a math teacher he had in high school; he said she was terrific. 'Oh boy, when she gets through explaining a problem, you certainly understand all about it—top, bottom, and upside down. And she won't go on to the next problem until we all understand it. She likes math, and when she gets through, we like it, too.' I was impressed, and I thought, wouldn't it be wonderful if all teachers could be like that! I know we would have to pay good money for good people, but I can't imagine a better way to spend it."

"We have to teach self-discipline," I repeated. "I realize that our democracy stands or falls on this matter of self-discipline. What I mean is having ordinary decency and the ability to measure one's self, and the right attitude toward other human beings."

"We as a people don't have respect for other people, and we don't have respect for other peoples' right," Eslanda said.

"Do you think this may be the result of too easy a life?" I asked.

"No, I don't think it is the result of luxury," Eslanda replied. "It's the result of deliberate systematic teaching, in the home, in the schools, in the committees, and even in some churches, and the result is chaos in human relations. White people think Negroes are below par, Negroes think white people are mean and stupid; the educated think the uneducated are low class, the uneducated think the educated are snooty; city people think country people are hicks, country people think city people are smart-alecky and slickers; Catholics think Protestants are not so good, and vice versa, and so it goes. It all adds up to serious and destructive divisions among our population, which put our nation in a dangerous position. All this is *taught*, so why can't we teach democratic human relations instead? De-

## AMERICAN ARGUMENT

mocracy, as we Americans have pretended to practice it, has not succeeded. We members of the minorities know that. It may well be that this is the real reason we fear communism."

"Do you think Pauli has an advantage over my children because he is a member of a minority?" I asked.

"In some ways he has. He knows, for instance, that he isn't 'free and white' and can't fall back on that instead of delivering the goods. He has to deliver."

"What effect does that have on self-discipline?"

"We in the minorities have to have some, or we can't make it," she replied.

"Do you think the character of the average Negro is higher than the average white person's?"

"Yes, I do. That's a big thing to say, but I believe it. I've thought a lot about it. I think it's very bad for a white person, child or adult, to be told, over and over again, that he is superior, just because he's white. I think it is very disintegrating to character to be taught one thing in principle, and the opposite in practice. I think it makes people abnormal, when they are prevented from behaving normally toward their fellow humans. All these destructive influences are continually at work upon the character of the average white American.

"On the other hand, with the average Negro, exactly the opposite happens. He is challenged at every stage of his development, and so he is forced to develop whatever qualities he has, to meet this challenge. Of course some fall by the wayside, and blame their own laziness or inertia upon discrimination. I am afraid the Negro is losing something important in this struggle, though. He is losing his gift of friendliness, and that is a great pity."

"I am going to have to agree with you," I said. "When I returned here to my own country I found more intelligent community of thought between myself and Negroes than I did between myself and white people. I wondered why—and I realized that I had grown up with the Chinese

people who had a philosophy of life which they had developed and by which they lived, and that white people have no philosophy of life."

"But they are going to need one," Eslanda reminded me. "They are going to have to consider others—other people, other nations—and get along with them if they want to survive. They are going to have to learn about, respect, understand, appreciate, and get along with the people in the world if we are to avoid another war. Even if we do have another war, if we do use the atomic bomb, after it is all over we will still have to learn how to get along with the people who are left on the earth. So why don't we learn now?"

"Eslanda, would you have advocated a treaty with Hitler?"

"Certainly I would. We did make a treaty with him, didn't we? An unofficial secret scandalous treaty that said in effect, 'You nip off Czechoslovakia and we won't look; it's too bad of course, but too bad for the Czechs—it won't really affect us; we mustn't risk losing our big money in the cartels—that's sacred.' And maybe, we thought to ourselves, just maybe, Hitler will take care of Russia; that country, that system, is getting too big for its britches, so it will be just as well to cut it down. That's the way our thinking went in 1939, as I understood it.

"And although I am most reluctant to face it, it seems to me that's the way our thinking is going now. If we are really concerned about the poor Czechs now, why weren't we concerned about them in 1939 when they were being trampled to death? That is, concerned enough to intervene?"

"And we were never really friendly with Russia, especially not in 1939 when we hoped Hitler would mow her down. We only became friendly when Hitler cheated, and wouldn't or couldn't play the game, and turned west. Remember?"

"Sometimes friendship necessitated by emergency

doesn't carry over into friendship after the emergency, and it could be that we feel the same way about Russia now as we did before—only now we know that if we want her mowed down we'll have to do it. It could be that Russia understands this only too well, so it's no wonder that 'we can't get along with Russia.' I could be wrong, of course, but that's the way it looks from where I sit.

"Certainly I would have advocated an open honest treaty with Hitler, and if he'd tried to break it, I'd have invoked complete embargo against him to force him to keep it. If we'd begun soon enough, we might have avoided the Second World War, and a possible third."

"You mean really not a peace treaty so much as a list of things that he couldn't do," I said.

"That's what treaties are—partly, anyway," she replied. "We could say, 'If you don't do thus and so, we won't trade with you in any way whatsoever.'"

"We had all the techniques for that but we didn't have the courage to use them," I reminded her.

"It wasn't so much a matter of courage!" she replied. "It was the little matter of our greedy businessmen saying, 'Oh, yes, we'll trade—else how will I make my profit? Look at that business of selling scrap iron to Japan, and getting it back in the form of bullets in our soldiers! We keep on, right now, trading with a very fascist Spain.'"

I said, "A businessman said to me once, 'Well, business is life, too. If I shut up my business, five thousand people would be out of work.'"

"We have to have a sense of proportion," Eslanda replied. "Five thousand people out of work isn't nearly so bad as five hundred thousand people dead from a war. Or is it? We're following our friends the businessmen again in the 'reorganization' of Europe. Very tricky, that!"

# X

## *How to Agree and Disagree*

"ESLANDA," I SAID ON THE LAST DAY OF OUR CONVERSATIONS. "I perceive that you and I agree on the ends for which we hope. I could be happy in your America and you in mine, did they fulfill the dreams we both have of our country. Where we differ, where our argument really lies, is on the means whereby we reach the longed-for ends."

"Where we part company," Eslanda said, "is still exactly where we have disagreed all along—on the idea of 'liquidation': immobilizing, removing, or if necessary killing off a few people who are being terribly destructive, in order that millions may live in peace and progress. You say the end does not justify the means, and in 1935 I would have fully agreed with you. But since then I have looked back and looked forward, and have been appalled by the killing I have seen. The total casualties of the First World War, according to the Almanac, were 37,508,686. We don't know yet what they will be for the Second World War."

"I don't like killing. I think it is barbarous and futile. But I live in a world which seems hell-bent upon killing, and there I was merely disapproving, being high-minded and idealistic about it. Then my experience in Spain changed my idealism to some extent, and I will tell you how."

"Paul and I went to Spain in January, 1936, at the invitation of the Republican government. We came to

admire and like the Spanish people, and we love and understand some of them whom we learned to know well.

"I remember very clearly an evening in Madrid, in the midst of the war. We were all gathered around the radio in the Presidencia, listening to the official news broadcast. Up to then, Franco's German and Italian planes had done all the strafing. Our Republican friends explained that they could not bring themselves to kill their fellow Spaniards. Franco, of course, had no such scruples, and was therefore having things very much his own way.

"But on this particular day, goaded by their heavy losses from air attack, the Republican forces had finally very regretfully brought themselves to launch an air attack against a Franco-held town. As the news came over the radio describing the success of this attack, our friends became more and more depressed and silent. When we congratulated them they said sadly, 'We should not have done it. Nothing can justify killing our fellow countrymen. Nothing!'

"At this point I became convinced that there can be justification for killing one's fellow countrymen, just as there is justification for killing mad dogs, and events in Spain thereafter have proved me right in this terrible conviction. Since then, how many, many Spaniards have died because these idealistic Republican Spaniards did not remove Franco and his fellow conspirators at the very early stages of their revolt! I have profound respect for the sacredness of human life, so much respect that I would, if there were no other way, sacrifice a few that the many might live. In the case of Franco, there seemed to be no other way.

"This is my honest, though very reluctant, conviction. It is possible that you are thinking of human beings in terms of ideals and principles, and that I am thinking of them in terms of their present performance. When human beings behave in terms of ideals and principles, I shall be eager to think of them in those terms, but not now. And

in the meantime, I am convinced that mad dogs, animal and human, should be killed. This procedure is the lesser of two evils," she concluded firmly.

"Neither do I think that a few should oppress the many," I replied. "But I believe that the methods of control should be much more fundamental and thoroughgoing than one group of citizens rising up to kill another. There must be a more intelligent approach than that. Wars come slowly, one incident piles upon another, and these incidents are only precipitated by a Hitler or a Franco. Man and circumstances meet at a certain fateful but not fated hour. Intelligent people, even an intelligent government, if there be such a thing, could deal with both man and circumstance, if it were done before they met. You know my conviction that no war is inevitable or even necessary."

"Yes, I know," Eslanda replied. "I thoroughly understand you, respect you, sympathize with you, and disagree with you. Right here at this point you will be able to see the more clearly why we disagree. We are looking at the problem from different backgrounds, you from the background of privilege, and I from the background of oppression. So we naturally have widely differing points of view. It is perfectly possible that your privilege has colored your point of view, and that the oppression my people suffer has colored mine. In that case, you will have to move over some, and I will have to move over some, so that we can reach a middle ground, a common ground."

"I think of life in terms of principle," I replied.

"But principle must be somewhere based on fact, must it not?" Eslanda replied. "If you will try considering principle in terms of performance and I will try considering performance in terms of principle, we'll both surely meet. That's fair enough. How much of your individual principle would you give up in order that millions can have a little bit of principle?"

"That brings us back to means and end," I said. "Let's



consider—and don't reject before considering! Our times are confused and turbulent and there has to be some kind of direction and some consolidation of good forces. Upon this we agree. But direction by whom?"

"By persons whom *we* can trust, because we put them in power. Everybody has got to say to someone whom they hope they can trust, 'This is what we want done, will you and you and you please do it for us? Please, and thank you! We will follow you *very* carefully, and if you don't do it, we'll have to try again, and find somebody else who will.' The point is, if we really do follow our representatives very carefully, and recall and change them if they don't do our bidding, they will soon realize we mean what we say, and there will be an end to all this nonsense. I honestly believe it's as simple as that."

"You're still not afraid of dictatorship?"

"No, ma'am! What I have just described is a dictatorship by the people. I believe absolutely in that. It is dictatorship in the American sense, in the democratic sense. Really, it is what we are supposed to be having now. It is what our Constitution calls for. But that is only in your beloved 'principle.' "

"Our officials would be just like the executives of a business house—if the results don't suit us, we can fire them," I suggested.

"Exactly!" Eslanda agreed. "If they do well, we'll give them a bonus. What we should look at is the dividend, which in this case would be the performance."

"I agree with you there," I said. "American people are in government as stockholders, and they must look for the dividend of performance. I should say we may lose the end we want because we haven't taken care of the means."

"Right and well said! I feel better now, because we are on a common ground where we can wholly agree. Perhaps we can even get together on this individualism business? You say the individual is the most important thing in the world. I agree that the individual is important, yet since

he doesn't live in a vacuum but in a world with other individuals, he will just have to respect their rights as well as his own. It may be that we only disagree on where we put the accent on individual: You put it more on the individual's own rights, and I put it much more on the rights of all the individuals together. Therefore I can come the more easily to the removal of an individual who actively works against what I consider most important—the rights of all the individuals together.

"I don't want you to think I am being fancy or righteous about this. Not at all. I say again that I'm being selfish. I know, in my experience here in America, that unless all the individuals get their rights, I cannot be sure of mine. You, on the other hand, can be sure of yours. I am in a minority here, and I don't like it. I will work hard for a change, so that there will be no more minorities, and we will all, including me, get our normal human rights. When we achieve that change, I will support it to the end.

"You, on the other hand, are a member of the privileged group, and naturally you like it very much, and would like to keep things that way. But you also feel that everybody should have an equal chance, so you work with me to help bring about some kind of change. Not too much change, mind you, but some.

"Now, having brought about this change successfully, not only in principle but in fact, I find that my people can and do get a lot of their rights which they did not have before—they get education, skills, health, cars, jobs, and so on. But you find that you have lost a lot of your privilege, your privacy, your position at the top, and have had to come down to basic things. You have always been used to a great deal, all of which seemed normal and necessary to you, so you feel uncomfortable, disappointed, even a martyr.

"So here we are! I feel I'm on the way up, together with millions of my people and a lot of other people besides, but you feel that you are on the way down, together with

a few other privileged folks. You go sour, you can't take it, you miss your superiority in brains, art, social station, money, or whatever. And behold, you become an 'ex.'

"That's as I understand it. I honestly believe that if you personally were convinced at the start that the change would be good for all, would raise the level of all the people, you would agree to work for the change. I further believe that once you did agree you would follow through at any cost, and even at the cost of your precious individualism and privacy you would follow through to the very end. I believe that. But I think you will agree with me, and this is not flattery, that such follow-through takes character and the strongest kind of endurance, moral, intellectual, and physical. And I think you will agree that our Western culture has not given this kind of character to many people.

"I have always been struck by the behavior of some members of the upper brackets in this country, during the great depression. Rich men who lost their money jumped out of windows, committed suicide, or sang such weary blues that they were heard all over the world. It was disgusting. Why should they think they should always have money? There is no law and no guarantee that they will always be the rich men, or that there will always be rich men. They gambled, didn't they? And is there a law that says gamblers must always win? No! There is a law that says that somebody must lose at some point. So these losers could have said, if they were *men*, 'Well, I've had my turn and it was very good indeed while it lasted. Somebody else will get a turn now.' No, they couldn't follow through with their gambling and take the losses when they came. Everywhere, during the depression, the rich complained much more than the poor. This time, the rich may try to precipitate a war rather than face another depression, or rather than rearrange our economy to prevent a depression."

"We may not even recognize that war when it comes," I said.

This was, indeed, my constant and secret fear. Looking back I realize now, as others have, that the Second World War began in Manchuria in 1931. I felt uncomfortably afraid at the time it might be so, unless it was prevented. This was not done, as all the world knows. The same foreboding fear hangs over me now. Perhaps some day we will know that the Third World War began with Churchill's speech in Fulton, Missouri.

"What do you mean?" Eslanda asked.

I illustrated by a true story. "Last summer a friend of mine, a famous economist, was lecturing at a certain university. After he returned to his room a young man came to see him who told him this story. He had been a conscientious objector during the war and had been put in prison. He was a promising scientist, however, and one day he was summoned to Army headquarters and told that he could be released if he would work on a scientific project. He inquired what this project was, since his principles would not allow him to engage in anything that would aid the war. He was told that it was a medical project, having to do with the effect of radiation on the human body. He agreed to work on this, was released, and was busy until the end of the war. Then to his surprise he was given a military medal. Much astonished, he asked why. He was told that it was for his notable work upon the atomic bomb!"

"That reminds me of the story Mrs. Leah Manning, Labor M.P. from England, told on the Nazis when she was in Boston," Eslanda said. "It seems Fritz and Hans had grown up together in Berlin, and Fritz had become a Nazi big shot, while Hans had remained a middle-of-the-roader. One day Fritz met Hans in the street carrying his very big heavy baby in his arms. Fritz said, 'Why, Hans, your baby is much too heavy to carry! You ought to wheel him around in a pram, or a baby carriage.' 'He's certainly

heavy!' Hans said, 'I've been trying everywhere to get a pram, but there are none to be found.' 'Well, well,' Fritz replied importantly, 'I'll see that one is sent to you immediately.' Hans was delighted and thanked his former playmate. A few months later, Fritz again met Hans in the street, and he was again carrying the now much bigger, much heavier baby. 'Why aren't you using that pram I sent you?' asked Fritz reprovingly. 'Well,' Hans said apologetically, 'you know, Fritz, it's a funny thing—we've tried and tried all kinds of different ways to put that pram together, but no matter how we fixed it, it always came out a machine gun.' "

We did not smile at these stories—they were not amusing but terrifying, and we sat silent for a moment, overcome by the solemnity of a possible future. Then I said, "Eslanda, you're a very lucky person. You are not helpless before the future. You can speak, you can act."

"The same is true of you, Pearl," Eslanda said. "We are among the exceptions in this democracy of ours. The great point we must make clear is that we cannot generalize from the exceptions."

"Do you think anyone can accomplish something, provided he has a special advantage of some sort?" I asked.

"That's an interesting question, and an important one in a democratic country," she replied. "The answer to it is confusing. Advertising, publicity, has become such a serious force that if one can get enough publicity, with or without talent, one has a chance for success. Of course if one has talent, then the chance for success is greater. But talent without publicity may remain buried, or is hard put to get a hearing or showing. The most mediocre talent with a 'name' can get instant hearing. Fabulous talent, unknown, often battles unsuccessfully. You have to 'know someone, who knows someone, who knows someone.' If you do, you can make some kind of success without any talent at all. Some ranchers rode on horseback across the continent to see President Truman, and succeeded in

seeing him. I'll bet there are many people who would try to see Truman on serious business for the nation, and would not be able to get near the White House."

"Do you think that Jackie Robinson and Joe Louis help their people by being so successful?" I asked.

"Yes, of course they do. But you might be surprised at the attitude the average Negro takes toward Jackie's and Joe's success. We know that Jackie is one of the very best basemen in the world today, yet he had to wait for several years before he got a chance to play big-league baseball—before they 'made it a policy.' We know that Joe Louis is the best heavyweight fighter who has come on the horizon for a generation. So when white Americans point to Jackie and Joe and say, 'Look how broad minded we are, look what wonderful opportunities this democratic country gives your people,' we are not impressed. We feel that it would be hard indeed to keep these men down, since they are the very tops in their fields. We may even be presumptuous enough to feel that Jackie is an important addition to the Dodgers' team, and that Joe, with his manliness and his integrity, is an adornment to a rather sordid boxing game.

"Personally I go even further than that, as far as big Paul is concerned. When white Americans say, 'Look at Paul Robeson—see how we allow a Negro to rise in our country,' I think, 'Rise, indeed—you could hardly keep him down! He has what has been described as one of the greatest voices in the world, he is a scholar, and a citizen of the world, so you are not doing him a favor when you "allow" him to succeed. Rather you are doing yourselves a favor when you go to hear him.' As I say, this may be impertinent and ungrateful, but that's the way I honestly feel about it. I think it's important to point out such facts occasionally, otherwise Americans may mislead themselves about their 'liberality.'"

"Why trouble ourselves about our people?" I asked next. "Can ordinary, average folk ever do much more than

just exist for themselves? Why 'save' them and for what?"

"Let's put it another way so that we can get an affirmative answer," Eslanda said to this. "Let's say honestly, no, our people haven't done much good, in spite of wonderful opportunities for good, and let's go on to say that we have the framework set up for good in our country, so let's try to fill in that framework with content, with living, working reality. That's the way our country and our people will be saved.

"Maybe it's a good idea when we are considering 'saving' a people to begin by 'saving' their victims first. For instance, in 'saving' the German people, we should first 'save' their victims. In 'saving' the American people, we should first 'save' their minorities. When we've done that, we might find that the rest of the people have been saved, too.

"I bought a copy of a magazine one day because the title on the cover interested me. It was, 'The Most Important Problems in America Today.' The article was made up of the dicta of ten congressmen, who in paragraph after paragraph listed the problems that they considered most serious in our country. Only one of the ten felt that we need a 'new economic and social order'; all the rest were concerned with prices and wages and similar materialistic matters."

"I could be quite happy if it weren't for the children," I said. "I live in a beautiful countryside, and it's never lovelier than in the morning when the children are walking along the roads to school. Then my joy flies, and I think, 'These children deserve the best that democracy can give them—and they'll never know why they won't get it. Yet it's their right to know.'"

"Do you know what some of Pauli's generation are saying?" Eslanda asked me. "They are planning to leave this country. A friend and schoolmate of Pauli's, a white American of good family, is going to New Zealand when he graduates from Cornell. He served two years in the Navy;

his brother was a ferry pilot during the war and flew to New Zealand often and he came to know and admire that country, which he insists is a true working democracy. Both boys are disgusted with America and plan to leave next year, both have excellent technical educations and are very fine young men.

"We Negroes were very much interested in the official report of the eagerness of white American war veterans to emigrate to Australia in search of a better life; seven thousand veterans from every state and territory have already applied for information, and this number increases by about a thousand weekly; some have already sailed. If white Americans who have just finished fighting for this country feel that way, there definitely must be a lot wrong with America, don't you think?"

We were silent for a few minutes, each thinking our own thoughts. Then I said, "Eslanda, we've been very critical of our well-loved country. I know our country hasn't given you as much as it has given me. This may sound very queer to you—I yearn over the white children not because I like them any more than other children, but because they are so cocksure and feel so safe, because they don't know your America is really theirs, too. Can't you see any advantage in being an American?"

"No, but I *am* an American, as American as anybody else in this country, so there it is," Eslanda said frankly. "It's like being a member of a family; you don't have to like your family if they aren't nice people—although you're supposed to. When they are mean and selfish and greedy and take advantage of you very often, how can you like them if you have any sense? But it's your family and you're stuck with it. Of course you defend it against outsiders, and you do what you can for it. Well, that's the way I feel about America. It's the most basic reasoning, the most basic feeling. When Americans treat me and my people like Americans, then I'll like it, and find advantage—and pride—in being American—not before!"



## AMERICAN ARGUMENT

"Do you think Pauli would say America has nothing for him?" I asked.

"I don't know." Eslanda replied, "He's very young, and he's always had everything. He certainly disapproves of the American way of life. When his friend was discussing democracy in New Zealand, he mentioned socialized medicine, and how it is practiced there. Pauli said, 'With all we have here, we should have been the first to accomplish medical care for everybody. But we can't get it past the A.M.A.' That's typical."

"I have lived in small countries like Japan and big countries like China, and we have to realize that problems of large countries are much greater than those of small countries." So I pleaded.

"I don't think I can agree that size has anything to do with it," Eslanda said. "England is becoming socialized. Europe is trying to. The Soviet Union is much bigger than we are, and she has become socialized. No, size is no alibi. China's problems are due to corruption, not to size. So are ours. To come right down to brass tacks, we know the reason we have not become socialized is because the power of big business, of Wall Street, has prevented it. Remember the opposition Roosevelt had when he tried to do a tiny bit of socialization?"

I asked, "Is there no room for patriotism in this world? Is it an obsolete thing?"

"I think true patriotism must be earned, must be deserved," Eslanda said sternly. "I don't believe in any kind of automatic respect or loyalty—not to parents, elders, or country. Loyalty must be based on worth. Respect, loyalty, and patriotism by law are obsolete."

"Eslanda, what is America as you see it?"

"I see a great rich land and a virile goodhearted people going to seed because they are misused, misinformed, corrupted. I see the people becoming greedy, selfish, arrogant, overbearing, psychopathic, because they have been nurtured on the superiority idea. I see all this as the great

tragedy of our era, all the greater because with some Christianity and some democracy, both available, this country and this people could lead the world out of chaos into an era of peace and plenty."

After Eslanda had left me that day, I took long thought. There is a center of corruption in our people, a central wrong that hardens our hearts and corrodes our spirits. One sees this hardness and this corrosion take place often enough in an individual when he continues a vice which forbids growth. Sometimes the individual knows what he is doing, sometimes he does not. But until he can realize the evil that is deadening his vitality, until he can summon sufficient will to throw it off, he continues a warped and inadequate life.

So it is with our American people at this hour. We have failed and are failing to provide the leadership that the world's people need and long for, the leadership that can be expected from us, I believe. The cause for this is that we are not willing to accept the basic fact of human equality. Our attitude toward Americans who are Negro invalidates our democracy, to ourselves and to other peoples, most of whom are colored. It invalidates our democracy to ourselves because prejudice makes us fail to see a human being for what he is. Prejudice compels us to lump whole groups together as being beyond our sympathy or understanding. This hardens the heart, not only to the despised ones, but toward all people. The heart cannot act upon the good principle of love. It is forced to divide itself, to love only those few, whose faces are thus, and to refuse love to all except the chosen. Alas, the effect of this is that the divided heart loses the power to love anywhere. Hardness creeps into all its parts and deadens the very center of life.

Prejudice invalidates our democracy to others because it makes us support old imperialisms and decayed governments under which other peoples have suffered and are still suffering from the inequalities of imperialisms and

tyrannies. Yet we hug our prejudice, we will not give it up. There are Americans who would yield democracy itself rather than accept the scientifically proved fact that color does not decide the place of a human being in life. Organized religion is corrupted by the denial of this principle basic to its life.

The weakness of the churches in their influence upon American life is the result of their compromise upon this principle of human equality. In words they grant it; in deeds they do not.

I am reminded here of a story I have heard about a young Negro mother. She lived in a pleasant town, liberal in many ways to the few colored people who lived there. But it did not allow little colored children to enjoy the public swimming pool. Some of the white people were troubled by this, and a few had the courage to say so one day in a small group. But who was to bring the matter before the town? A name was suggested, that of one of the leading rectors. The young Negro mother who had been sitting silently listening, shook her head.

"Father Denny wouldn't do it," she said gently.

"Oh, why not?" one of the good white women asked.

"I am a member of his church," the young Negro woman said. (You can see, Eslanda, how liberal the town was—they allowed Negroes to become members of the white churches!) The Negro mother went on, "Father Denny christened my baby. I know him. Always after he christens the white babies he kisses them on the forehead. But he didn't kiss my baby."

There was quiet heartbreak in her voice, but her pain was not so great as that of those who heard her. For it is not the Negro who suffers most gravely from prejudice—it is we who practice it. White America, so potentially powerful, is distressed psychologically because it is crippled spiritually. Our power is only material, the material power never wins, in the end. The real force in the world is in human beings, in their faith and their hope. We cannot

win that faith and hope so long as we will not practice human equality. The peoples are awake today. All over Asia and Europe, all over the world, indeed, people know now what is wrong. They may not know what is right, but at least they do know that a man's skin does not determine the manner of man he is, nor does it declare what sort of life he may lead. Our American democracy is built upon fallacy, until we know and acknowledge this fault in ourselves.

Until we do, Eslanda, we cannot lead the world out of chaos into an era of peace and plenty. You see, nobody believes in us.

# XI

## *What Americans Can Do*

ESLANDA AND I HAVE DIFFERED PROFOUNDLY. IT IS impossible for us to agree upon our own country. No, not just our country—we have differed on the whole world. The conditions that make it impossible for us to see our country the same are conditions that hold in the world. Wherever Eslanda and I might live, she and I would differ.

It is not a personal difference. Woman to woman we agree. We like each other. She has no prejudice against me as an individual, nor have I any against her. I trust her and she trusts me. More than once when I have wanted advice in something I was doing, I have simply taken up my telephone and found Eslanda, wherever she was. I can put my need into a few direct sentences and her advice comes in the swift practical ways that are characteristic of her. I hope she knows that she can count on me in the same way.

And yet here we are, far apart as Americans, and even farther apart as citizens of one world. I feel that were the world to divide into two great camps, which God forbid that ever it may, Eslanda would be in one camp and I in the other. Am I right in this, Eslanda? I hope I am not. But I am afraid I am. In your camp would be all the many millions who have suffered at the hands of my kind. Even though you know me, you might not let me come over the dividing line. Perhaps I might not come, myself. I don't know. I think of that day, now long ago and yet as fresh

as this morning in its indelible memory, in a city in China which had been my home for many years, where suddenly there were the two camps. White people were in one and brown people in the other. I had far more friends among the Chinese. I spoke their tongue as well as my own. My heart was all with them. But those who attacked did not know me as an individual and they saw not my heart, but my blond hair and blue eyes, and they set me apart. I had to stand that day with those of my own blood; I was given no choice.

Strangely, while I have been talking with Eslanda all these days I have felt again that setting apart, and I powerless to choose. Yet Eslanda is a kind woman and just. She does not divide the world by color, *for it is not color that divides the world*. It happens that in this era in human life in which we live, in these last five hundred years, white people have been the aggressors. In another era brown people may be the aggressors. Then it is essential, for our country and the world, that aggression be abolished. In this era white people have been the privileged. But in another era it may be that dark people will be the privileged. Then it is essential that privilege for one group be abolished.

Here I am again talking about ends! Eslanda accuses me of concerning myself continually with ends, or what she calls "principles." She and I agree on principles. It is how to get them upon which we disagree. Perhaps it is not really our country upon which we disagree. What is a country, ours or any other? No more than a big heterogeneous family, living together on an estate that it holds in common, but in which the shares are unequally divided. The family defends the estate against strangers, but it quarrels mightily within itself as families often do, especially when they are big. No, what Eslanda and I have been arguing about is a world situation, and it is exemplified in our own country. It does not exist only here—it exists per-

haps everywhere. But we see it most clearly here, where we both belong.

The spirit that is so strong and energetic in Eslanda is important for me to know and understand, not merely because it exists in her. She is only one person. I am only another. What we individually think, if it be individual opinion, may be interesting but worthless, unless in some way our opinions and beliefs and feelings are ours because we are parts of great groups.

Thus I take Eslanda very seriously indeed. Here is she, handsome, healthy, even wealthy, secure if any of her kind can be secure, and yet cutting herself off from me and my kind by her refusal to accept life as an exceptional individual. Were she a lesser person, she might be smugly content, she might let sleeping dogs lie, she might say to herself that since all is well for herself and hers, she would let be. But Eslanda will not let herself be merely an individual. She sees in herself every Negro in the United States, every poor white in a poll-tax Southern state, every black man, woman, and child in Africa, every untouchable in India, every colonial in Indonesia and Indo-China, every woman anywhere who longs for equality.

When I began these conversations with her I thought of her as my friend, a woman, pleasant, intelligent, gay. Now after all these hours of talk in which we have tried to penetrate to brain and soul, I see her encircled by a host. The light shines clear and hard upon her, but behind her and about her is the shadowy host. I can never again see her as one. Those millions of human beings have spoken to me through her voice.

I know them. I have met them in every land under heaven. I have heard the murmur of their many voices. But it has taken a clear American voice to make them articulate to me, a voice in my own country. If Eslanda feels as she does, with all the advantages she has had here in this richest, most powerful, and most comfortable of countries, then what must those others feel? If Eslanda,

knowing me and liking me, as I am sure she does, refuses me and rejects me because of the host she sees surrounding me, then how much do those others refuse and reject the host with whom I, by some accident of birth, must stand!

The anthropologists do well to remind us constantly that races are all potentially equal in ability, and that there is no such thing, so far as science can see, as an inferior race. Stupid white people need to be told this over and over again, and white children should be taught it in school, as they are taught other scientific facts. Myths and superstitions must be done away with by scientific knowledge. But most of the people in the world know already that there is no inferior race. Only a handful of people, in comparison, believe otherwise. They are not important, taking the world as a whole nor, since this book is first about our own country, are they even important here. We should not therefore spend too much time in trying to educate them. Nor is criticism of much use—only the rarely intelligent individual anywhere can accept criticism gratefully and use it with benefit. We Americans listen to criticism of ourselves with secret or loud derision. That is, we simply do not believe we have any faults. When visitors come here and tell us of our faults we are amused and tolerant of their failure to understand us. Not for one moment do we see the slightest truth in what they say. We even commend ourselves still further for being so good natured as to allow them to say what they think about us. We have a revealing everyday phrase—"So what?"

But ignorance dies of its own accord when the benefits of knowledge are expressed in practical terms. What scientists must now do is to put their knowledge into practical terms. It is no longer enough merely to say that all races are potentially equal in performance. Scientists must show us the way to performance and initiate performance. They must tell us in dollars and cents that it will pay to give equal opportunities and benefits to all groups, not only



because it is right to do so, but because it is common sense. They must make us afraid to do otherwise. They must tell us that the sickness of mind that afflicts the aggressor group in the world today is the result of refusing to acknowledge this common sense. It is the result of fear, lest revenge be taken someday by the present oppressed.

I myself do not fear this revenge. Only morbid-minded individuals want revenge, and for reasons which psychologists understand, it is the aggressive individual, or nation, that becomes psychopathic and mentally tortured by fear of persons whom they have injured. Those who suffer from aggression have too much to think about, and liberty is too great a joy, when it comes, for them to take time for further anger and revenge. It was Hitler, the aggressor, who succumbed to insanity. Healthy folk rejoice in change for the better, hold no grudges, and are glad to forget past sorrows. The people in the world today who are least healthy minded are white people in the United States, South Africa, and Australia, and with them a handful of too rich people who have never toiled for themselves and hope never to do so. These people are mentally sick because they cannot see that they are obsolete. They are clinging to an era that is over. The secret of life and content is to begin a new day with courage and with the belief that it can be made the best of all days, whatever change it brings. To view change with discontent does not prevent change. It only makes miserable the mind that so views it. The apathy, the moral decadence, the sour withdrawal from the world, which characterize so many white people today, is proof that they are suffering from a sense of group guilt, and that they fear the inevitable change.

For I am sure, above all else, that tremendous change is taking place in the world now, whether we white Americans are willing to see it or not. The spirit of human equality is on the march. It will proceed, and we can lead or we must follow. It cannot be stayed or stopped. It has passed out of our hands to control. Not all the power of

empire can prevent its fulfillment. Empire is dead, even though we are not willing yet to bury it, and like a corpse kept too long above ground, it is fouling those who cling to it.

A strange thing it is to sit together these days with men and women from India and Indonesia, old friends many of them, and hear them talk of white folk! They pity us. The old burning hatred is gone. They are not afraid of us any more. They know their feet are set secure upon the path to freedom. The few shackles that remain will soon drop away. Why should they fear what is dead, and why should they even hate the dead? They have no desire to attack the corpse. They are looking forward, not back. They are planning the future.

I sat at luncheon not long ago with the leader of a team of Olympic athletes from a great nation in Asia. He was visiting the United States before he went home, and he was somewhat scornful of the Olympics. Oh yes, he said, his team was very well treated in London, and they had enjoyed their visit, though after so many years of war and undernourishment, naturally they had won no points. But they were not interested in points. He doubted whether Asian countries would want to join again a mere sports event which glorified the well-fed nations by giving them publicity and making them feel superior. Perhaps he would organize an Asian Olympics, where sports would be relegated to their proper place and where the emphasis would be on the health of the average citizen and where there would be conferences of scientists to exchange ideas on how to build national health and how to find the cause and cure of diseases that afflict the ordinary person. He was tolerantly amused at the self-glorification of the Americans who had naturally won most of the honors in sports. What interested him more, as he visited our country, was to see whether our average citizens had good health and whether they had the chance to learn the skills of pleasurable sports. He did not consider a few spectacular indi-

viduals of any significance. He hoped that some day his people could win honors because they had a well-fed healthy populace. Even so, he was not interested in honors and competition. He wanted all peoples to have the same benefits, and he saw no glory in winning races of any sort.

It is a civilized attitude of mind, and one almost entirely foreign to my own people, I find. Here competition has risen to such absurd heights that a single figure can be confused, in the popular mind, with our national attainment. We are bemused with wonder at our own greatness when we look at our few celebrities in sports and on the screen, and we forget to look at the rest of our people. We have put ourselves in the power of small mean coarse men, who know how to produce these few celebrities. What really counts is our average citizen, our unthinking, careless, ignorant, goodhearted average citizen.

Yes, it is quite true that this average citizen is well off in some ways. He owns an automobile of some sort, he has a house, and just now a job. But he has a sense of emptiness. All his possessions do not make him feel he is important. He suffers from discontent and apathy, from fits of laziness and from drunkenness. He quarrels a good deal with his wife and is not steadily affectionate with his children, and they do not feel secure in him as a father. Talk with him for a while, and let him talk more than you do, and you will find that he suffers from a vast vague discomfort, which the Germans used to have so much and which they call *Weltschmerz*. This discomfort falls upon people anywhere when they feel, without being able even to put their fears into words, that things are not going right somewhere, and that they themselves are being carried along unwillingly in that wrong current.

I feel this *Weltschmerz* among many white Americans, but not in the average Negro. A few individual Negroes have it; they belong to the comfortable few who, unlike Eslanda, have decided to be satisfied with the fortune

which is theirs, and to keep quiet, for their lifetime. But they are not happy, either.

Human beings have by nature more than an individual sense of right and wrong. They have also a group sense. They know, without being able to say so, when the group is going wrong. Irritability, hostilities, suspicion, bad temper, surliness become group characteristics in such case. Common sense and gaiety disappear. There is far too little gaiety these days among white Americans. Our young people are sad, indeed. The singers sing sad songs, and the young novelists write books of futility and despair, and there is no vision, even though this is the most exciting age in human history, when the peoples of the whole world for the first time move with a common impulse toward a better life. Our young men and women look only at themselves and so see nothing. The young are quick to feel the atmosphere of the group.

And yet there is no need for us to plod this dreary path. These peoples who pity us, these millions, are for the most part just and generous. They value our skills and our techniques. They will impart to us their wisdom and their friendship in exchange for them. They are thinking in world terms. "All men are brothers" are not empty words in most countries. There is still time for white folks to join the brotherhood of man, if they will. But they can only join in spirit and in truth. Words from us are meaningless now—we have spoken so many words! *Eslanda* is right when she uses the word "performance." The peoples of the world no longer believe in the American word, not even in the American word of honor. They rose yet once again to the magic of the Four Freedoms. But when those words, too, proved empty it was the last time. I do not believe there is a country, certainly not in Asia, not in Africa, where the people believe what we say. Now we must *do*.

Do what? I will put it simply—act, and act from the world point of view. No longer can we act egocentrically,

as though the hub of the world were with us. We are only one nation among all others, and what benefits others will benefit us, and what benefits only us will not even benefit ourselves. Whether we know it or not, and however we seek to divide it, *the world has become one* and not all the powers of the Soviet Union and of the United States joined together for destruction, as they seem to be, can destroy the growing unity of mankind. They will only destroy themselves.

How can we Americans be healed? We will be healed when we have united ourselves with humanity instead of subjugating ourselves to the powers that would use us against each other. There is health in being in accord with life. A family is healthy in body and mind when its members are unified in mutual benefit, knowing that what is good for one is good for all, and in mutual accord, each giving to the other that respect which he craves for himself. A nation is healthy when there is this same sense of mutual benefit and accord among its citizens. The world of peoples finds health in the same benefit and accord. But our ruling groups here in the United States are not yet willing to join their lives to the human stream. They fight it, they seek to stay it, they refuse to consider mutual benefit and common accord. They still believe, foolishly, that they can claim benefit for themselves first. Yet benefit is temporary unless it is based on accord, and accord can only come where there is a common spirit.

I stress our relation to world benefit and world accord, because I believe our national ill health, our mental reversions, our apathies and petty quarrels, our low state of morale, our bewilderments, spring up like diseases in an evil climate. They cannot be cured one by one. They can only be cured when the atmosphere is made clean again and infused with life.

Practically, our financial soundness depends upon our joining ourselves, upon terms of equality and mutuality, with the world life. We cannot be assured against depres-

sions unless we are in the world stream of trade. We cannot be a truly educated people, adequate for our times, unless we are in the world stream of education and familiar with the cultures and civilizations of other nations. We cannot even keep our bodies free from diseases brought in by airplanes and ships, unless we think of world health. Our children can no longer go to the old narrow schools, where history and geography and literature are only American, with perhaps a passing gesture toward Greece and Rome in the past and England and France in the present. Our famous Hundred Books must include the great books of the East as well as of the West, before they can give our people a balanced understanding of the world as it is today. We cannot set our own house in order until we have taken our part in setting the world in order. Even charity no longer begins at home.

Eslanda, were she sitting here with me at this moment, would remind me in her soundly practical fashion that I am once again talking about the end without having given the means. I acknowledge the accusation. Perhaps I am always in love with great ends.

Well, how shall we all set the world right? We cannot, of course, do it alone. That would smack of old aggressions and dominations. Moreover, we do not know how to do it alone. Within our nation we would bitterly resent any one group taking over, even for the best of good ends. We know that none of them can do what they say they are going to do. We know that all of them together pulling and hauling, shouting and contradicting, will probably get us somewhere, the sidelines making cynical remarks and catcalls meanwhile. Cynical remarks and catcalls are also part of our way of life. I often wonder what will take their place with the more polite peoples as they undermine their governments.

We Americans must apply our wisdom to our world. Let us not suppose that all wisdom is with us, either. We must not believe only in ourselves, or that only we are right,

when we are but one group among many in the world. We must be American, and realize that only by group thinking, group discussion, group agreement and compromise, can we arrive at the state of mutual benefit and accord. I have wondered often at the anger of Americans over the behavior of Soviet Russian representatives in United Nations. Gauche and ill-mannered as this behavior has often seemed, we should welcome its frankness. We should have feared smooth talk and silence far more. I myself would have been glad had our own representatives exploded as freely, and certainly I wish the representatives of my other country, China, could have spoken what is secretly on their minds. Perhaps the real moral equivalent of war is the opportunity, the time and the place, to say what we think, as loudly and as rudely as our nature inclines. It is astonishing and sometimes embarrassing to hear what some people will say, but is it not better to have it said? Nothing is so terrifying as the silent child. As a parent, I prefer a tantrum, for then I know where I am. Besides, I agree with the Chinese in thinking that childhood is a time for tantrums, and if they do not come out then, the system is poisoned, for tempers will appear in the adult which are far more serious and difficult.

The United Nations therefore is the place where plain and even angry talk should be taken as a matter of course. There should not be too many rules of politeness. Representatives ought to be encouraged to express themselves freely without being paid the important attention of anger. Continued exhibitions of this sort, in an atmosphere of pleasant and somewhat amused understanding, can scarcely continue long, even as a child cannot keep up screaming if nobody cares whether he screams.

I remember once in a little town in the heart of China there was a lone elderly American woman of Scotch Presbyterian ancestry working as a doctor in a small mission hospital. She was a good woman, and her soul was dry and practical and just. One day a Chinese family brought to

her one of their members, an elderly woman who was tortured, they said, by a devil and had fits which were very troublesome to the family. No Chinese physicians had been able to exorcise this devil. While the family described the fearful symptoms, the lady promptly began to have a seizure. The old American doctor watched her with attentive calm, her gray eyes cold, her soul so dry. She said nothing at all. She just stood there, tall and wintry and white haired. Soon the Chinese lady, spoiled by years of excited consideration, began to grow uneasy in the midst of her fit. She carried on with difficulty under that cold gaze. At last she stopped and turning to her family she said quite rationally, "I can't finish unless this foreigner goes away."

The United Nations is a wonderful place in which to have fits. Only the utmost folly would call these seizures serious. The treatment should be one of common sense, and the common sense should be exercised in practical terms.

Aside from this, the truly invaluable part of the United Nations is the world administrations, at present much curtailed and repressed, chiefly by the United States. Yet here is where our strength should lie. We are not good at arguments—our vocabulary is too limited. We tend to fall into short four-lettered words which mean something to us but mean nothing at all, for example, to a Russian, whose language is far more fluent than ours. Russians can all talk, I think. So can the Indians and the English and the French and, in their own elegant fashion, the Chinese. In fact, we Americans are the worst talkers in the world. But we are good at doing, when we set ourselves to it, and therefore we should concentrate our efforts on making effective the practical aspects of United Nations. We should see to it that the world food administration really functions, for in the general benefit we will naturally have a large share, through our agriculture. World food spells the continued prosperity of the American farmer,



and he has no hope otherwise. Yet foolishly it is we who have hamstrung the world food administration.

So likewise it is we who have delayed and hampered the world health administration with our unnecessary conditions, and yet our people, not to mention our scientists and our drug manufacturers, would share mightily in a flourishing world health administration. We have shown little interest indeed in the weak efforts of the world educational organization and yet we would all be happier in a world of educated peoples rather than in the present one of a handful of literates among a mass of illiterate folk, hungry for learning. These are all simple and practical works, not more difficult to administer than many of the present cartels, which are world administrations in the reverse and run only for the benefit of a few individuals.

The means, in short, lies at our hand, if we will use it, and there is no need whatever for the violence of revolution and war, for "liquidations." All that we need is the willingness to change by growth.

What Eslanda said about me applies to all Americans. She asked me if I were willing to give up a little of my precious individualism, if thereby all people could have more freedom to be themselves, and she asked me if I were willing to give up some of my privilege so that others could have more privilege, and she asked me if I were willing to give up some of my present security in order to make the world more secure for everybody.

Well, Eslanda, the answer is yes, I am willing and I am ready.

















UNIVERSAL  
LIBRARY



100 911

UNIVERSAL  
LIBRARY